



Reaching Our Destination in Him

Luke 24:13-35

A sermon by William M. Klein

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13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, **14** and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, **16** but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. **17** And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" **19** He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. **22** Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, **23** and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." **25** Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! **26** Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. **28** As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. **29** But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. **30** When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. **32** They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" **33** That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. **34** They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Lk. 24:13-35 NRSV)

1

The disciples on the Emmaus road were deep in thought when a stranger walked alongside them. "Why so low?" he asked. He could see

they wore disappointment like a pall. Actually the image of a pall explains their mood pretty well...for a pall is a heavy drapery used to cover a casket.

The two disciples had such high hopes for Jesus. It may well be they poured themselves utterly and completely into what they believed Jesus would achieve for them and for all of Israel. When that did not happen, when Jesus died on that cross...the gloom they felt was all consuming. Their disappointment really was like a pall, a death shroud.

No doubt their story is *their* story. It is not our story. But we can identify with their disappointment, can't we...because I bet there are ways in which Jesus has not lived up to your expectations. You may think it is blasphemy to even think such a thing...but I bet there are ways you have put everything on the line and Jesus has not come through. You have knocked and the door was not opened. Maybe some tragedy has befallen you and you were left wondering - "I have been such a good person...why did Jesus allow this bad thing to happen?" As the threat of the invisible coronavirus continues and there is no sensible end in sight for our sheltering in home and masks and social distancing...we wonder, why doesn't Jesus fix all this! Oh, yes...this is the disciples' story but we can identify with their disappointment.

We sang our alleluias to our risen king on Easter morning. We declared that in Jesus' resurrection death was and is a defeated enemy. Because he lives, we shall live also. And we meant it. We meant it.

So why is there still pain and anguish in this world? Jesus' death and resurrection were supposed to signal an end to all that. The empty tomb was supposed to mark the defeat of evil. The resurrection was an announcement to all the world that God's kingdom of peace has come and is an accomplished fact.

There are realities aplenty in our lives suggesting Jesus' resurrection did not change a thing. Marital strife, child neglect and abuse, greed in the market place, destructive addictions, combative rhetoric, this damnable pandemic...the list goes on and on and on. If Jesus' resurrection really happened...if his resurrection really defeated suffering and sorrow and death...why isn't there more evidence? Why doesn't this world look more redeemed?

2

The disciples on the Emmaus road were deep in thought about their disappointment when a stranger walked alongside them. "Why so low," he asked. They had hoped Jesus was the one to redeem Israel...but his

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suffering and death on a criminal's cross spelled an end to that hope. That is why they were so low.

What had they really expected? They thought that to redeem Israel Jesus would turn the tides on those who were in power...that the Romans would be toppled from their thrones and Israel would take charge. They expected him to do (what we expect him to do) – i.e., make us successful and pain free and happy.

That *is* what we expect, isn't it? In spite of the fact Jesus died on a cross we expect that following him should make our lives successful and pain free and happy. In spite of the fact the earliest Christians and, indeed, the first several hundred years of Christians thought of themselves as “people of the Way” – people who followed in the way of Jesus...we expect that following him should come with prizes rather than scars.

I think that too often we live with the unjustifiable expectation that faith in Jesus inoculates us from those things in this life that can harm us. Where do we get this notion? Jesus the crucified Christ did not proclaim a “prosperity gospel.” He said turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, deny yourselves, and take up your cross daily. He said when you have done it to the least among you, you have done it unto me. He said the greatest among

you must be a servant to others. Does that sound like a pain-free existence? Does that sound like we should expect a bed of roses?

Faith doesn't win us a pass on suffering and death. What faith does is give us the courage to follow Jesus into the heart of the world's darkness. Faith in the crucified Lord gives us the courage to thumb our noses at evil, to stand tall against injustice, to stand with those whom Jesus loved above the rest – i.e., the poor, the sick, the widows, the orphans, the outcast. Faith helps us trust that Jesus' vulnerable love was and is our model for what it means to be our truest self and a child of God.

3

In this extraordinary story Luke told, do you remember when the disciples recognized Jesus? When he broke the bread. What do you suppose there was about this physical, tangible drama that opened their eyes?

We may never know for sure...but I think it reminded them of something Jesus had said and done just days earlier. At the Last Supper he had said something surprising and unexpected as he broke the bread. In the midst of celebrating the Passover it was and is customary to bless and break bread. But after Jesus blessed and broke the bread this time he said, "This

broken bread represents my body broken for you." And before the night was out his body was broken.

I wonder...is it possible that on that Sunday evening, reclining at a table in Emmaus when Jesus broke the bread for the first time this side of Easter, the two disciples realized at some level that brokenness was and is Jesus' way in this world - that kingdom life is not about pain free existence, or fame, or fortune after all? Is it possible the disciples realized God uses broken things: broken soil and broken clouds to produce grain...broken grain to produce bread...broken bread to feed our bodies?¹

They had expected Jesus to be the one to redeem Israel - which meant they expected him to be a conquering Messiah by winning the day with a strong arm. When the post-crucifixion, post-resurrection Jesus broke bread in Emmaus maybe it begin to sink into the disciples' heads and hearts that it was through brokenness that Jesus *did* in fact redeem Israel and them?

Luke tells us that after the disciples' recognized him he vanished. I'm not quite sure what that means. But I do understand what Luke said next. The disciples' said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

I understand that because I have had times when my heart was trying to tell me something my eyes were too visionless to see. My heart tells me to love more and to fear less. My heart tells me to trust more and be less guarded. My heart tells me to look for “that of God” in the face of everyone I meet. My heart tells me that getting my way has more to do with fear than it does with discipleship. My heart tells me to live into hope...the kind of hope lawyer and theologian William Stringfellow talked about when he said, “Hope is believing despite the evidence...and then waiting for the evidence to change.” I like that definition of hope. I like it because it acknowledges the brokenness of life as well as the conviction that in time the risen Christ will transform the darkness of this life. In him all things shall be made alive.

The hope that defines us is grounded in Christ's broken body. Our hope grows like a mustard seed out of soil from which Christ's body was broken for us. We give witness to that hope and confirm that hope by our willingness to let brokenness be our way in the world, too. In fact, it is when we, like Christ, share in the brokenness of others that we are made whole.²

Ernest Hemingway once said something about brokenness in his novel, *Farewell to Arms*. He said, “The world breaks everyone...some are stronger in the broken places.” As unlikely as it may seem in a world that glorifies

winners...it is when we, like Christ, share in the brokenness of others that we are made strong. It is when we allow ourselves to be broken for others that we are made whole.



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Endnotes:

¹ Sweet, Leonard I. 1995. Strong in Broken Places. Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 10.

² Sweet, 164.