

When Hope Catches Us By Surprise
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Luke 24:13-35

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.

Horrible experiences make long trips feel even longer. Benign example: The bus ride home after our basketball team lost in the state semi finals. Not-so-benign example: The drive home from the counselor’s office when I understood my marriage was over. Have you ever had to take a

trip like this, from the hospital, court house, jail?

Seven miles is a long trip on foot, but that's not the longest journey described here. This other journey is one that is so long, many people live their whole lives without making it.

The most significant journey taking place here is not the journey to or from Emmaus, but the journey of faith taken from the disciples' *heads* (as Jesus unpacks the scriptures for them) to the disciples' *hearts* ("Were not our hearts burning within us?").

Our Methodist friends even have a retreat ministry named after it. It was on this retreat that a friend of mine finally made that journey. He'd been a Christian all his life, but it wasn't until he spent a weekend with 60 other guys locked in a downtown church gymnasium that he made what he calls "the twelve-inch journey" – the one from his head down to his heart.

Some people will go their whole lives without taking this journey. They may even be pious church goers who serve faithfully but never make this journey. It can be all too easy to believe things about God without ever having an encounter with God.

This is a critical problem in the church. I recently heard an interview with a teacher/leader who said that the American church is facing a discipleship crisis because we have come to believe that information equals transformation. We unconsciously work from the assumption that if attend another Bible study, we read another book, listen to another sermon or (yes, I know that irony of what I am saying here) listen to another podcast then ***the change will happen!*** For most of us, most of the time, this works. We get by. We cope. We even have enough success in life that it all feels pretty good. Until something happens that blows the whole thing apart.

For these two disciples, it was seeing their hoped-for Messiah put to death. All their hopes died with him. Honestly, I don't know how they could even talk about it. And yet this stranger appears. He seems like a caring, compassionate person. He's seems genuinely interested. He cares. So they start talking, describing the worst day of their life. That's how Jesus is. When things are at their worst, Jesus always shows up.

Core

Jesus shows up in our darkest times to bring new light and life

Jesus shows up, and he listens. He wants to hear the story as we tell it, as we experience it. He wants our perspective. Telling our story with as much emotional honesty as we can is really important if we want to be open to God's perspective entering in.

Jesus shows up, and he teaches. Now I don't like that Jesus calls these two disciples "foolish" and "slow to believe what the prophets taught..." but what if we can hear this as a gentle rebuke. I think about the people who came to me while I was going through my divorce and they said things like, "It may seem right now that your life is over and you will never experience any happiness or joy ever again, but that is not true."

Jesus shows up, and he reveals himself. The meal feels like a regular old meal until Jesus turns it into a eucharistic meal! A holy meal, a meal where God's presence and power are given to God's people!

Call

Things we can do to be open and willing when it comes to this journey:

If this is a journey you want to take, there are 3 things you need to be prepared to do.

- **Hold on:** Don't let Jesus walk on by. Invite him in. Be insistent. They didn't realize that their invitation was a prayer, but we can see that right?
- **Move down:** Let Jesus do what Jesus does best. When you sense the story changing, go with it.
- **Speak up:** Share the story with someone else! Share it in real time with people who can be trustworthy to hear the worst version, and then keep telling it as Jesus reveals more. Jesus never reveals himself to a person "just" for that person. He reveals himself so that the person can testify. Tell what Jesus has taught you. Tell how Jesus has fed you. Tell what Jesus has shown you. Ever see a new bride hiding her engagement ring? Ever see a student keep his "A" report card from his parents? A grandparent without photos of the grandkids? So there is no reason to see a Christian hiding what Christ has done for them. This is why we have a Christian Community!

Thinking about West Valley. This is the time when we tell the story honestly as we experience it, EVEN AS we wait to see how God is going to show up in it! The Emmaus story reminds us that nothing that Jesus went through – from rejection to violence to the cross to the tomb – caught God by surprise. It all fits with God's unfolding story.

Let us pray.