

# On the road to Emmaus

Luke 24:11-35

April 26, 2020

Life is journey, we say. Actually that is what the Bible tells us about our life. We see many journey stories in the Bible.

Abraham and Sarah emigrated from their hometown and journeyed to a new land, Palestine. Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt and went through a series of hardship. Moses had to run away to a place called Midian and lived there for 40 years before returning to Egypt. Ruth immigrated to Bethlehem with Ruth, her mother-in-law after she lost her husband. The Jewish people emigrated out of the bondage of slavery and wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years before crossing the Jordan River. Later they were exiled to Babylonia and Assyria and returned back home later.

Full of journey stories in the Bible.

There is one more thing the Bible says about our life journey. That is that we'll never journey alone.

To Abraham and Sarah, God said, "I will show you where to go." God intervened in the Joseph's journey and fulfilled his Upper story plan through his life. So did God in the life of Moses and Ruth. God accompanied the Jewish people all the way while they traveled across the desert wilderness for forty years. They said they could see him, as "a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day." They had to go on another journey, this time into exile. They even discovered that God accompanied them to that trip, too.

That is the second thing the Bible says about our journey. We'll never travel alone.

And that is exactly what Luke says the Resurrection means. It says, we don't journey in this world alone now. The Lord is with us. Luke tells the story of the Road to Emmaus to show this truth.

Two people walking down the road to Emmaus. We don't know who they are. Luke says that the name of one of them was Cleopas. That is about all we know about them. Some guess the other person must be his wife, Mary. Their guess comes from the Gospel of John which tells that there were several Marys at the cross and one of them was "Mary the wife of Cleopas." Interesting.

Now it is more interesting to know that Cleopas and Mary, or whoever it was, they were not part of the 12 superstar disciples of Jesus but their story was included in the Gospel. They were ordinary Jesus' followers like you and me. What Luke points out is that the encounter with the risen Christ happened to ordinary people and so can it happen to you and me.

Cleopas and Mary, or whoever it was, walking down the road, leaving Jerusalem after the crucifixion, despondent, defeated, discouraged, going home. Their hope is shattered like broken pieces of glasses. They are helpless now.

A stranger appears and walks down the road with them. The stranger says to them, "Excuse me. I couldn't help but overhear your conversation about some terrible thing that has happened. Tell me about it." Cleopas says to the stranger, "You must be the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard the news." He told him about Jesus, the mighty prophet, how he was arrested, and how he was tried unjustly, and how he was crucified.

Then Cleopas said, "A strange thing happened. Some women visited the tomb. It was empty. They saw an angel who told them, 'He's not here. He is risen.' Some others came later and saw the same thing, the empty

tomb, although they didn't see the angel." Then he and his journey partner said, "We don't know. It is all so strange. Anyway that's all past now. It's all over. We're going home." The stranger speaks. "You know, it was all prophesied." Then he gives them a Bible lesson as they walk down the road, till they come to a little town called Emmaus, seven miles down the road from Jerusalem.

The stranger appeared to be going further. They said, "Will you stay with us? It is getting dark. Why don't you have a meal with us?" So they go in the inn at Emmaus, and sit down together at a table. The stranger takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and hands it to them. They recognize him. It's the Lord! Then he is gone. They said to each other, "It was him! He was here with us!" They rush to Jerusalem and tell the eleven, "The Lord has risen indeed!"

Such a lovely and wonder-full story.

This story has been understood and interpreted as a communion story. It shows that when we celebrate the Lord's Supper Jesus is always the Host. But there is one more thing we can see clearly. That is that it is a journey story, as well.

Two people, discouraged, confused, angry, hopeless and helpless. But there the risen Lord drew near and went with them.

There's promise in the story – great promise. In the midst of, or in the aftermath of defeat and despair, of suffering and pain and confusion, there is always the friend who joins us.

What is Easter? Luke replies, What Easter means is that we are not alone in our journey. The Friend knows where we are and draws near and journeys with us.

One of the greatest images of God in the Bible is that of a shepherd that goes out to look for the sheep that are lost and scattered. Jesus boldly declares, "I am the GOOD SHEPHERD." The 23rd Psalm begins with that great declaration, "The Lord is my shepherd."

The good news of the Gospel is that God like a shepherd is searching and looking for us and finds us where we are and bring us home. God finds us when we are in grief. God finds us when we are confused. God joins us in our journey when we are perplexed and lost. God journeys with us as our Friend all the way always.

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has been turning literally everything upside down. We are in fear. We are worrisome. Uncertainty overwhelms us. A lot of questions rise within us. "When will we return to normal? What if this crisis come back again? How will we carry out the mission and ministry of the church? How long will we need to bear this crisis? What would new normality look like?" The longer this pandemic crisis lasts, the more tensely uncertainty grows among us.

Let me share with you the words by Frederic Buechener, theologian and author. They are insightful and encouraging.

*Certainty is the mark of the commonsense life— gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life. To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness, but it should be an expression of breathless expectation. We are uncertain of the next step, but we are certain of God. As soon as we abandon ourselves to God and do the task He has placed closest to us, He begins to fill our lives with surprises.*

*Jesus said, "...unless you...become as little children..." (Matthew 18:3). The spiritual life is the life of a child. We are not uncertain of God, just uncertain of what He is going to do next. When we have the right relationship with God, life is full of spontaneous, joyful uncertainty and expectancy.*

*Jesus said, "...believe also in Me" (John 14:1), not, "Believe certain things about Me". Leave everything to Him and it will be gloriously and graciously uncertain how He will come in— but you can be certain that He will come. Remain faithful to Him.*

Amen. Amen.

Back to the story,

Do you notice the way the risen Christ comes to the two disciples?

They didn't recognize him. They thought he was a stranger. When they went in the inn, the story goes, "He appeared to be going further." Which means, he doesn't ever push himself on us. It means he never wants to be where he is not wanted.

You know that beautiful image of Christ in the Book of Revelation. Christ at the door knocking. That text says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him." He came as a stranger on their journey, and entered their lives quietly and gently when they extended an invitation.

Likewise, when we take the bread and the cup at the communion, we encounter the Risen Christ. When we open the Bible, we see the Risen Christ coming and talking to us. When we fellowship with our sisters and brothers, we feel the presence of the risen Christ. When we reach out and serve people in need with love, we see the risen Christ coming and joining us. Yes, when we welcome flowering blooming and trees growing and animals running around, we see the risen Christ smiling in their midst.

One more. Yes, whenever we pray, we encounter the risen Christ meeting with us. Jesus says during his sermon on the mount, "whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father

who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”  
(Matthew 6:6) What Jesus says is that stay in silence and in solitude, and God will come and welcome you and meet with you.

Henri Nouwen, priest and theologian describes what to expect in solitude this way.

*“In solitude we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word, who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone.”*

Someone said we are now in the Great Pause. Normal activities has been stopped. We are confined and isolated. The Great Pause is what we experience now. Now might be the opportune time to enter the inner room and shut the door behind and remain in solitude. Now might be the best time to encounter the risen Christ in our inner room.

Cleopas and his partner returned to Jerusalem once they encountered the risen Christ and joyfully shared the news, shouting, “Christ is risen indeed!”

May we encounter the risen Christ day by day and share with one another the joy of journeying with him. Amen.