

The Stranger On the Road – Reflections on Luke 24:13-35
By Pastor Cathi Braasch for April 2015

A few weeks ago, when it was still Lent, we pondered the “Emmaus Road” text during one of our midweek services. Now, on this side of Easter, it’s good to reflect on that text, Luke 24:13-35, again.

Two disciples were walking from Jerusalem home to Emmaus that first Easter Day. Brokenhearted, grief-stricken, overwhelmed, they were, by what they had witnessed the previous Friday. We now call that Friday *Good*, but it had left the souls of those two as dry as the dust stirred by their steps.

First, they had been convinced that Jesus was truly *the One*, the promised, long-awaited savior of Israel, the Son of God. Then, they had witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion. Then, quickly, away his body was borne to a borrowed tomb, as those bearing the Son of God raced the setting sun, the beginning of the Sabbath that would delay full burial preparations until the first day of the week.

There’s more than one way to deal with shattered hopes and dreams and bitter grief. These two figured they’d just walk away from it, as soon as the Sabbath was over and travel was permitted.

But try as they might, they could not escape the truth. A strange man on the road fell into step and conversation with them, much as we might do when we’re sitting by the coffee pot, waiting for major repairs to be completed so we can get back on the road. Soon, the two disciples began to wonder where this guy had been the last few days. Under a rock? Can’t you just hear them asking, “Hel-lo? Don’t you have a clue about what happened in Jerusalem this past week?”

Well, Jesus knew what *actually* happened, not to mention what *really* happened, the Story behind the story. Jesus, the very Word of God, went right through that open door of their questions and commentary. Starting from the beginning, he gave them the full account of who the Messiah was, why he had to come, and how all of the pieces of the puzzling last week fit together, perfectly, in the full sweep of salvation history.

The time and the seven-some miles between Jerusalem and Emmaus must have flown by. Now back in their hometown, they invited this stranger to stay the night. He joined them at table, took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. It was in the breaking of the bread that, Luke tells us, the two disciples finally recognized Jesus. Then, Jesus was gone just as quickly as he had appeared.

The awestruck twosome recalled the events of the day and evening with this stranger who was no stranger at all. “Were not our hearts burning within us as he opened to us the scriptures? We’ve got to get back to tell the rest who we’ve seen! How he showed up right when we needed him, even if we didn’t realize it. How he showed himself to us -- sharing the word of God and sharing himself in the breaking of the bread. And we’ve got to go tell them NOW!!!”

We, like the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, are masters at figuring out how to cope, to get by, to push on through all that hurts and grieves us. Like them, we sometimes might think that all is hopeless -- even though the image of Christ on that cross is seared into our memory, as it was into theirs.

How often do we miss seeing Jesus Christ walking right alongside us? What would it mean for us if we actually recognized the crucified, risen Lord walking alongside us in all of our brokenness, heartache, and loss – as well as in all our celebrations, joys and victories? This is where the Lord promises to be: Always with you who believe, trust, and follow him. Sometimes we don’t expect him, let alone recognize him, even though we should! In the Holy Word and the Holy Supper, Jesus meets us every time! And he also meets us coming and going, as he did with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus in this text. Never too early, never too late, always right on time.

People of Peace, remember this as you head from Easter to wherever life’s road takes you. Christ walks with you, and Christ can always be found in Word and Sacrament at Peace. Remember this in all your joys and sorrows, victories and losses, great celebrations and somber remembrances. And when you return home, may you remember to invite him, bid him, come and stay. *Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let your gifts to us be blest. Amen.*