



Does anyone here enjoy long walks? I've found walking is like therapy for me. It's a time when I can think through things that are troubling me. It's a time I can pray. There's something about the physical exertion involved in walking that frees me to think. Sometimes, if Lynn is with me, it's a time for us to talk about things we're going through; things we're learning or challenges we're facing. Often I start out in a not so good place, but when the walk is over, though my circumstances haven't changed, my perspective has, and it's almost always better. I may be tired, but I'm hopeful and encouraged.

This morning we're looking at a story from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, about two people on a seven mile walk. For them this would be a life changing journey of discovery. One of them was named Cleopas. We don't know the other one's name; it could be his wife or a friend. Both of them had been followers of Jesus the past few years, but now all that seemed to be over. Their journey began in Jerusalem where Jesus had been crucified. They were in a state of despair and confusion, crushed by the events of the past day. But, on the way, they made a discovery that changed everything.

There are a lot of people in our world who start out on a journey much like these two did. Life has a way of beating us up. We start out with so many great expectations and dreams, but things don't always turn out the way we expected. Sometimes we find ourselves living our dream, but the dream itself isn't as great as we believed it would be. I read this week about Spence Jackson, a successful and powerful man working in Missouri's auditor's office. But his boss took his own life on February 26. Then Spence found out his own job might be in jeopardy when they replaced his boss, and Spence took his own life a month later. In a note he wrote, "I'm so sorry. I just can't take being unemployed again."

Sometimes as followers of Christ we think we're immune to that kind of thing. Perhaps we've been taught the Christian life is supposed to be full of answered prayer, victorious living and contagious joy. But it hasn't turned out that way. What do we do? How do we walk down that path? How do we move from a place of despair and confusion to hope?

### **Jesus Uncovers Our Crushed Hopes and Expectations**

That's what Cleopas and his companion must have wondered. As the sun rose on Sunday morning and they started to walk home from Jerusalem, they were disillusioned, perhaps resolved to

leave their foolish dreams behind. As they started out, someone joined them.

**Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; (Luke 24:13–15).**

As the two of them walk along, they're having an intense conversation over the events of the past day. It's like they're bantering back and forth in a search for answers. Why had their expectations about Jesus come to such a tragic end? And then a stranger walks up and joins them. This wasn't unusual since it was wise to travel roads like this in groups for safety purposes. But what was unusual is this was the risen Jesus and they didn't recognize him! Luke says "they were kept from recognizing Him." It's implied God was doing the preventing. It seems God has something he wants to teach them before he opens their eyes to see Jesus. If they recognize him right away, they'll miss something. We'll see what that was in a moment. But isn't it significant in the midst of their confusion and despair, Jesus is with them? Think about that. When you're overwhelmed with discouragement, when you have no idea why this or that's happening to you, when you've lost hope, he's right beside you, even if you can't recognize him.

Jesus begins by asking them some questions. Look at verses 17–19a:

**He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"**

**They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"**

**"What things?" he asked.**

He says, "What are you talking about?" At that, they stopped dead in their tracks: "Have you been living in a closet? Don't you read the papers? Don't you know the things that have happened?" As they said this their faces were downcast. But then Jesus comes back again, "What things?"

Now don't you think Jesus knows the answers to these questions? Why then does he insist on asking them and getting their answers? No doubt it was more for their sake than for his.

Throughout the Scriptures God asks people questions, not because he needs answers, but because, in giving those answers, we learn a whole lot about ourselves. One of the best ways I learn anything is when I discover the answer for myself. In the garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. God comes along and calls to them, "Where are you?" and they're are forced to look at themselves hiding from God. They fess up and say they hid because they were naked. So God asks, "Who told you that you were naked?" On another occasion, when Elijah ran like a scared rabbit from Jezebel and went into the desert wanting to end it all, God comes along and asks, "What are you doing here?" He's forced to look at himself, a prophet of the Living God, hiding from a woman!

These questions force us to come to grips with where we're at. Often this involves a painful realization of our own unbelief or sin. That's the case here. Before they could discover the risen Christ, they had to discover their own misconceptions and unbelief. Look at their response to his questions in verses 19b–24:

**"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."**

They express a loss of hope. They tell him all they expected Jesus to do, but now he's dead and their hopes are dashed. Jesus was arrested and brutally murdered on a cross. They also express confusion: "Some women went to the tomb and his body was gone. They said angels told them he was alive. Some others went down to check it out, and, sure enough, the tomb was empty. But, still, nobody's seen him." Notice their misconceptions of who Jesus is and what he came to do. They called him a prophet, but Jesus was much more than a prophet. He was King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They also misunderstood his mission. They'd hoped Jesus would overthrow Rome and make Israel a mighty nation again. Maybe some of you are disappointed with God today. You expected him to do something in your life and he didn't. Maybe God hasn't lived up to your ideas about him. That's how these two felt.

I love how Jesus just listens. He lets them get it all out. He doesn't correct them right away. He meets them right where they're at. But one thing that's clear is they had a merely human perspective

of the events that had taken place. They didn't see God's hand in it. Think of how different that was from Jesus' perspective. When he stood before Pilate, he said, **"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"** (John 19:11a). In the worst situation possible, he's able to see his Father's hand in it. A few years later the apostle Peter demonstrates the same perspective. As he was preaching to the religious leaders, he said, **"Jesus of Nazareth...was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead..."** (Acts 2:22-24).

That's viewing things from God's perspective. Though God isn't the author of evil, he's in control of everything, and he can actually use evil to accomplish his purposes. Perhaps you look at the circumstances of your life and you're disappointed or confused. Things haven't quite turned out like they were supposed to. Your marriage, career, children aren't what the storybooks described. But in the midst of this, God is in control. Don't let circumstances be your taskmaster. There's someone with you who's conquered everything. He's Lord of your circumstances. Like Peter said, "But God raised him from the dead..." That changes everything.

### **Jesus Reframes Our Expectations Based on the Scriptures**

As I said, Jesus had some things to teach them before they recognized him. He's already revealed their crushed hopes and misconceptions. The next step is for them to discover the truth of the Scriptures.

**He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (verses 25–27).**

These two were crushed because their expectations didn't conform to God's word, which clearly taught the Messiah had to suffer. And so, right there along the road Jesus unfolded the Old Testament to them. Wouldn't you love to have been there? Later, after Jesus left, Luke says they looked at each other and asked, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They'd heard the Scriptures taught since they were kids, but never had it come alive like this. It's like they were on fire with excitement. Why? Because Jesus was teaching them. We can study the Bible until we're blue in the face, but unless Jesus teaches us we can't really grasp them. The Scriptures are the very words of God; so they take the mind of God to grasp.

Michael Bird grew up in a secular home in suburban Australia where religion was categorically rejected; it was seen as a crutch, and people of faith were derided as morally deviant hypocrites.

Rates for church attendance in Australia are some of the lowest in the Western world, and the country's political leaders feel no need to pretend to be religious. In fact, they think it's better to avoid religion altogether. As a teenager, he wrote poetry mocking belief in God. His mother threw enough profanity at religious door knockers to make even a sailor blush. Many years later, however, he read the New Testament for himself. He says, "The Jesus I encountered was far different from the deluded radical, even mythical character described to me. This Jesus—the Jesus of history—was real. He touched upon things that cut close to my heart, especially as I pondered the meaning of human existence. I was struck by the early church's testimony to Jesus: In Christ's death God has vanquished evil, and by his resurrection he has brought life and hope to all."

Sometimes we look at the Bible as a bunch of rules to live by, but what we really find there is a person. Jesus is on every page. The law of Moses anticipates him. All those instructions about washings and sacrifices point to him. The prophet Isaiah wrote of him, "*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:4-6). These two had missed this. They had no mental framework of a suffering Messiah, but Jesus was reshaping their expectations according to God's word. When you read the Scriptures, do you let his Word shape your understanding of him and your expectations for life? Do you believe though God's plan might include pain and disappointment, he's still sovereign and can be trusted?

Some of us are like the old man who went for his first ever ride on an airplane. He was 85 years old and very anxious about flying, but his relatives talked him into it. One of his grandchildren was at the airport when he arrived and said, "Grandpa, how'd you like flying on a plane?" He said, Oh, it was okay, but I never really put my full weight on the thing." I think some of us are like that with the Scripture.

We can begin to see why these two were prevented from recognizing Jesus. Before they knew it was him, he wanted them to see the Scriptures clearly taught he'd be crucified and rise again. I wonder if they could have walked away right then without ever recognizing Jesus and still become powerful witnesses for him? Jesus wants to wean us from depending on anything but his Word. We don't have the benefit of seeing the risen Jesus, but we do have the same thing Jesus showed these two. We have the Scriptures, which tell us he's risen, and we have the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to what God's Word says. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas, "*Because you've seen me,*

*you've believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

## **Jesus Reveals Himself as the Risen Christ through Breaking Bread**

But as they approached Emmaus Jesus had another discovery for these two. This, of course, was the discovery the man they were talking to was actually Jesus. Look at what happened next.

**As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.**

**When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (verses 28-32).**

By now they must have sensed something special about him. When they reached Emmaus, notice Jesus acted as though he'd just keep on going. Why? I think he wanted them to invite him to stay, which was customary in that culture. But he wouldn't stay without an invitation. And they did invite him to stay. Luke says they "urged him strongly" him to stay.

At dinner that night, Jesus did something unusual. He took bread, broke it, blessed it and began passing it out. That was strange. Imagine on Thanksgiving day, everyone's sitting at the table waiting for the turkey to be carved, which is the job of the host. There's a lot of pride that goes along with the job. But suppose a guest rose up and began carving that turkey. That's what Jesus does here. He's doing the host's job. But there's a reason for this. As he broke the bread, "Their eyes were opened and they recognized him." Later in verse 35 when they report all this to the other disciples, they said they recognized him specifically in the breaking of the bread. Why did Jesus choose to be revealed then? Some say as they watched him break the bread, they noticed the nail wounds in his hands. Others say when they saw him do this, they remembered other times when he'd done this, like the feeding of the 5,000. We don't really know.

As true as any one of these may be, the central fact here is God simply opened their eyes to see who this was. How that happens is something of a mystery to us, but a few things are worth noting. First, as I said, they had to invite him in. There's an aspect of our own will that plays a part in this. We have to be willing to say, "Lord, I want to know you. I want you to come into my life. I want you to join me on this journey." Another thing worth noting is he did this at a meal. This fits well in Luke's gospel. In his gospel a lot of important things happen over ordinary meals.

Sometimes it's in the ordinary activities of life he reveals himself. Maybe that's why we do this thing in the church called The Lord's Supper or Communion. It started as a meal where believers broke bread and sipped wine to remember the crucified Christ. Jesus is revealed to us in something as ordinary as bread and wine.

Almost as quickly as they recognize him, he vanishes. But even though he's gone, they see him more clearly than ever before. They saw him more clearly than when he was with them for three years prior to being crucified. They certainly saw him more clearly than on their walk to Jerusalem. That's because God opened their eyes. Notice the very next thing they do is recall their time in the Scriptures with him. "Were not our hearts on fire..." It's like the entire discussion now made sense, like they'd found a lost key or solved a great mystery. The next thing you know, they race back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples.

**They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread (verses 33–35).**

It would have been highly unusual for them to retrace their steps at night back to Jerusalem. No one traveled at night back then. But nothing would stop them from sharing with the others what they'd experienced. When you come to really see and know the risen Christ, you can't help but tell others about him. And notice that when they show up, they find their own experience is confirmed by Peter's. The apostles tell them Jesus appeared to Peter as well! So their own experience is corroborated.

To be with Jesus is to be on a journey of discovery. Where are you at on this journey? Maybe you're in a place of despair or confusion. Your expectations have been crushed. Do you know he's still with you? You can't see him but he's there. He walks with you and he can give you hope. Someone once said, "The world offers promises full of emptiness. But Easter offers emptiness

full of promise" (Carolyn Arends). Empty cross, empty tomb, empty grave-clothes, all full of promise. If I were writing the Easter story, I wouldn't choose emptiness as the main symbol. We can't understand the way God thinks. But when emptiness is part of our journey, it's good to remember for us who believe, even that's full of promise. The world makes a lot of promises, but they're empty. Easter offers emptiness full of promise. Why? Because if Christ is risen, that changes everything.

Perhaps you're in a place on your journey where he's asking you some telling questions about yourself. You're having to come to some very painful realizations about who you are or what you've done. That's hard. Maybe it's time you just tell him the whole story. Pour your heart out to him and don't worry about what he'll do. He wants to hear you out.

Or perhaps you're discovering the Scriptures. As you do that, your whole view of life is being rearranged. Your expectations are being messed with. Maybe you thought the Christian life would be easier, but you've discovered it's hard. And now you're beginning to see in the Scriptures he never promised you an easier life; he called you to a life of following him to the cross. But in the midst of that, there's hope.

Or perhaps you need to invite him to come and sit down and eat with you. Maybe he's waiting for your invitation. "Lord, I want to know you. I want you to come into my life. I want to sit down and eat with you."

Or perhaps it's just time for you to become a witness. He's asking you to make a 180 degree turn and go back in the middle of the night and tell someone about what you have seen and heard.

To be with Jesus is to be on a journey; a journey of discovery. There may be pain and disappointment along the way, but there's always hope and there's always promise, because he's alive. "The world offers promises full of emptiness. But Easter offers emptiness full of promise."

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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