

Road to Emmaus

April 30, 2017 (previously used on April 6, 2008)

Luke 24:13-35

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of our crucified and risen Lord. Amen

I've been under the weather the past couple of weeks, and therefore, I'm resorting to a practice known among preachers as "going to the barrel" or "dumpster diving" or "Golden Oldie Sunday"...that is, reworking a previously preached sermon. This morning's sermon first saw the light of day nine years ago. I'd be surprised if you remembered it, but then again, many of you have extremely good memories. Anyway, my hope is that you will find this morning's "New Revised Standard Version" helpful in the process of making sense of our gospel reading for the day.

We don't really know why Cleopas and his companion were walking to a village called Emmaus on that Easter Sunday afternoon so long ago.

- Perhaps that was where they lived.
- Maybe they intended to visit somebody or take care of some business.
- Or perhaps Emmaus was just an excuse...a distant place to get away from the terrible things they had experienced in Jerusalem?
 - That's what they were talking about anyway...how their friend and teacher Jesus had been arrested, condemned and crucified.
 - How their hopes and dreams had evaporated with Jesus' death.
 - How rumors were circulating far and wide concerning Christ's body which was now missing from the tomb.

It's clear that they were overcome by sadness and confusion, hopeless and frustration...and so they were walking.

Maybe that's what we all do when we're overcome by such feelings of emptiness and loss.

We walk...we walk somewhere...anywhere...we walk to Emmaus.

In his novel, "**The Magnificent Defeat**", Frederick Buechner wrote that all of us walk to Emmaus from time to time:

Emmaus is "the place we go in order to escape - a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands and say, 'Let the whole damned thing go hang. It makes no difference anyway.'...Emmaus may be buying a new suit or a new car or smoking more cigarettes than you really want, or reading a second-rate novel or even writing one. Emmaus may be going to church on Sunday. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas - ideas about love and freedom

and justice - have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish (people) for selfish ends."

And so we walk to Emmaus, muttering to ourselves as we go, lost in our reveries of a life that doesn't make sense, awash in questions, questions like those in a deeply introspective poem by Jeanne Marie Beaumont called "**Afraid So.**"

Just listen...

Is it starting to rain?
Did the check bounce?
Are we out of coffee?
Is this going to hurt?
Could you lose your job?
Did the glass break?
Was the baggage misrouted?
Will this go on my record?
Are you missing much money?
Was anyone injured?
Is the traffic heavy?
Do I have to remove my clothes?
Will it leave a scar?
Must you go?
Will this be in the papers?
Is my time up already?
Are we seeing the understudy?
Will it affect my eyesight?
Did all the books burn?
Are you still smoking?
Is the bone broken?
Will I have to put him to sleep?
Was the car totaled?
Am I responsible for these charges?
Are you contagious?
Will we have to wait long?
Is the runway icy?
Was the gun loaded?
Could this cause side effects?
Do you know who betrayed you?
Is the wound infected?
Are we lost?
Will it get any worse?

You get the picture. Questions like these, and a million others, can set our feet walking toward Emmaus...before we even know it.

Almost 50 years ago, our whole nation found itself suddenly on the road to Emmaus. On April 4, 1968, as many of you may remember, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

- Shocked, demoralized, confused and outraged...no one could believe what had happened.
- All those grand hopes and words and dreams suddenly dead and gone.
- All across America – across racial and cultural divides – people began to march toward Emmaus.

But somehow, as we walked mournfully together, we learned, as did Cleopas and his companion long ago, that miraculous things can happen along the road to Emmaus.

- Somehow, often when we least expect it, we find that we're not alone.
- Somehow, in the middle of our journeys to Emmaus, "in all of the ordinary places and experiences of our lives, and in all of the places to which we retreat when life is too much for us," the risen Christ suddenly appears, engages us in conversation, opens our eyes to the truth of God's saving grace, and offers us the bread of life.

And strangely enough, the risen Christ often comes to us in the most ordinary of ways... in the embrace of a friend, in the kiss of a spouse, in the beauty of a morning sunrise, in a word of forgiveness, in the reading of Scripture, in the baptism of a little child, in bread and wine at the Lord's table...or, as was the case 49 years ago, in the words of a modern-day prophet.

The night before he was killed, Dr. King spoke publicly for the last time with words that foreshadowed the next day's events. His final words proclaimed for all to hear that we are not alone and that the road to Emmaus leads to the promised land.

Just hear him speak:

"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

Amen

