

**“Anyone, Anywhere”**

**Sermon from Luke 24:13-35**

**Given Sunday, May 1, 2022**

**for the First Baptist Church of McMinnville**

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*That same day, two of the disciples were making their way to a village called Emmaus – which was about seven miles from Jerusalem – discussing all that happened as they went. While they were discussing these things, Jesus approached and began walking along with them, though they were kept from recognizing Jesus, who asked them, "What are you two discussing as you go your way?"*

*They stopped and looked sad. One of them, Cleopas by name, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened these past few days?" Jesus said to them, "What things?" They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet powerful and word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people – how our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free. Besides all this, today – the third day since these things happened – some women in our group have just brought us some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn and didn't find the body; they returned and informed us that they had seen a vision of angels, who declared that Jesus was alive. Some of our number went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said, but they didn't find Jesus."*

*Then Jesus said to them, "What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Didn't the Messiah have to undergo all this to enter into Glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all of the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of scripture which referred to the Messiah. By now they were near the village they were going to, and Jesus appeared to be going farther. But they said eagerly, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening – the day is practically over." So the Savior went in and stayed with them. After sitting down with them to eat, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them.*

*With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who immediately vanished from their sight. They said to one another, "Weren't our hearts burning inside us as this one talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven and the rest of the company assembled they were greeted with, "Christ has risen! It's true! Jesus has appeared to Simon!" Then the travelers recounted what had happened on the road, and how they had come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.*

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Have you ever tried to pull yourself together? Like, has anyone ever walked in on you when you're upset, or crying, and they start to look concerned, and you wipe your eyes or you put on a brave face so when they ask what's going on you say, "oh, oh, nothing, I was just - uh - I was just getting ready to come and find you!"

And maybe they don't really believe you, but they can tell you don't want to talk about it, so they let it go, and follow your lead, and together you make this unspoken pact not to revisit whatever was upsetting you so badly.

You know what I appreciate about this story?

That's *not* what these two do.

They are walking, and they are upset, they are re-telling, re-living the story of the past few days, when their friend was killed and with him their hopes for a new world, a better way, and when this stranger comes up and says, "hey, what's going on?" they *don't* say, "not much, what's going on with you?"

The stranger says, "hey, what's going on?" And they say, "Are you for real? Have you been paying attention at all?" And he says, "What? What do you mean?" And they say, "Well, let us tell you..." And then they do.

They identify him as a stranger and then they tell the story of their unmet expectations and their dashed hopes and their swirling anger and their profound sadness and now their confusion at this latest news, their fear about getting their hopes up just to have them destroyed all over again. These two let this stranger fall into step with them and with all of that raw emotion. And he does. Easily. Perfectly.

They have no interest in protecting their pride, in hiding their vulnerability. They just let him in. Maybe they don't have the energy to put up some kind of front. Or maybe they're just done with pretending.

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Theologian Bruce Epperly says resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion.

Not long ago I sat with a woman whose husband had just passed away. She had been with him the day before; she was in their home now. She kept retelling the same piece of the story. "I thought I'd just gone to visit him at the hospital," she would say. "I thought he was coming home. I told him, 'I'll see you tomorrow.' That's what I said. I told him, 'I'll see you tomorrow.' But now tomorrow won't come."

She said this bit over and over again; like she was trying to convince herself it was real - this notion that the tomorrow she'd envisioned won't ever arrive.

If anyone had said to her, "Oh, but it might!" - what kind of mess would that make?

Resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion.

At least death we understand. Much as we resist it, much as mourn it, it is at least what we know.

These two, as they walk along the road, they are resisting and they are mourning and they are wrestling with whether or not

it makes any sense to hope again. And they let this stranger into this reality where they don't know what their tomorrow will be.

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They let him in. They tell him their story.

They identify him as a stranger and then they tell him their story, and in return, he tells them their story back again. But bigger. He tells them their story starting from the beginning, from Moses and the prophets. The story starting with Moses is a story of liberation. The story of the prophets is the story of God's dream for a new world, remade along the lines of justice and peace. In that story there is also song and sorrow, there is prayer and power; it is a story of a particular people and a story of the whole world.

And he fits their story, the story of these two people, over these past three days, he fits it into that sweeping narrative.

Later, these two will say that their hearts were burning inside them. Later, as they remember this story-sharing, that's what they'll say: *We traded stories and our hearts burned inside us.*

Before that big moment of recognition at the end of this story, these two came to know, as they walked that road, that who they were with Jesus did not die with him on that cross. Because they were willing to open their broken hearts to this stranger, because they gathered at table for the breaking of the bread, they found a new kind of wholeness.

As they told their small piece of the story, and heard the whole story told back to them, they understood that their old life was being carried over into something new, that it had always been part of something bigger. *It's the story that has that power, even before they recognize the stranger.*

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Here's some Bible trivia for you:

Cleopas, the only named one of the two on the road here, isn't mentioned anywhere else in scripture. And we have literally no clues to go on to track down his companion. We don't know anything about either of them.

Which means: *they could be anyone.*

And Emmaus? The town seven miles away, the destination of this walk? No one knows where it is. A few possibilities have emerged, but no scholar is willing to say for certain, "Yep, this is the place referred to in that story."

Which means: *it could be anywhere.*

And if this story could be about anyone, and could be set anywhere, I don't think it's our instruction to figure out specifically who and where it's about.

*I think it's our invitation to live*

*as though it's about everyone, everywhere.*

Isn't that the promise of the resurrection? Isn't that the real good news? Not that Jesus came alive again in one specific time and place, but that Jesus lives again, because he was always more than himself, more than one specific time and place.

When he was born, *they named him God-with-us*, and when he died, this small band of friends and followers resurrected that promise *as they began to recognize God-with-them*, in anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere.

We know that it surprised them, at first. That's what these stories are about, these particular moments of recognition, these uncanny reminders: she was in a garden and someone said her name with a certain kindness; they were on the road and someone told a story with a depth of understanding; they were around a table and someone broke bread with a certain graciousness. These small, good things, each of them, their own miracle, none of them too far from us, all of them, like all of us, part of something so much bigger.

May it be so.