

*Emmaus*  
*Luke 24:13-35*

Did you see them walking the Emmaus road, heads bowed, passing between them the off-rhythm awkwardness of mournful conversation? Didn't you get the impression that all they wanted now was to go home? Who could blame them? You know what it's like.

When your plans have fallen through,  
when you interviewed well but somebody else got the job,  
when a moment's inattention leads to the accident  
    or a fleeting foolishness brings the costly ticket,  
    when the marriage fails  
        or the parent stumbles  
            or you lower the casket,  
when what you had  
    or thought you had  
        or maybe just had hoped to have  
            is gone,

you don't want to stay there with the emptiness. You turn your back on it. You walk away from it. Maybe, you go home.

The disciples we find on the road to Emmaus hadn't even been able to head for home right away. Devout Jews were not about to travel on the Sabbath, especially the High Sabbath of the Passover, so wherever sunset found them on Friday, there they would stay until the sun rose on Sunday. They had been in Jerusalem or camped on the hills just outside its gates for a week already. They had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, just as God's most devout followers had been doing for a thousand years.

They had followed the Anointed of God, Jesus, the Son of David, as he entered the city of David accompanied by shouts: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna! You are our salvation! Save us now!"

That was the previous Sunday.

Before they even entered the city gates the following Friday morning, the man they had followed to Jerusalem was hanging on a cross outside the gates, and everything was in chaos.

Jesus had been captured and crucified, and the only other leaders the hundred or so followers had known, the central core of his disciples, the 12, had scattered, and could not be found because they did not want to be found.

How they spent their Saturday we could only speculate. Did they find their way to the upper room? More likely, did they sit up all night on the Mount of Olives where they and the other pilgrims had camped, wondering what would happen to them now?

When Sunday morning came, as eager as they had been to be gone, they stayed for a while, for the most incredible stories were circulating. The Prophet's tomb was empty. Women were talking of visions of angels. Peter and another disciple had run to check things out. They verified that the Master's tomb was empty; him, they had not seen.

Disheartened, disoriented, tempted by hopes that seem both vague and unwise, Cleopas and his companion (Mrs. Cleopas, perhaps?) finally turn their backs on

Jerusalem for the long walk home. As they walk, they pass their grief back and forth between them, for as you know, that is the only way grief can be carried.

Then Jesus came up from behind them. They are kept from recognizing Him. To them He is just some stranger. “What were you talking about?” He asks. What do they say? Do they let him in on their grief? Do they think they will be able to keep from breaking down as they tell the story from the beginning? Who is this stranger? Is he a threat? If you have just spent the last two nights fearing arrest, how much should you trust this overly inquisitive stranger?

Cleopas dares it. He pours out his heart, his pain, his confusion and his dashed hopes. The glad hosannas, deep betrayals and sudden violence, the now-it’s-full and now-it’s-empty tomb. How the prophet of God, mighty in word and in deed, was hunted down and killed by the people entrusted with the very house of God and its sanctifying sacrifices. Fear and resentment scorch the edges of the words in which he hands a piece of his emptiness to the stranger who asked to see it.

And after he has poured off his pain to expose his soul, what is the Stranger’s reaction? “You’re really not the sharpest knife in the drawer, are you?” “Foolish ones,” he calls them. “Slow to understand.” And then He opens the Scriptures and beginning with Moses and the prophets He shows them how what had happened was foretold, necessary, and intentional.

They ask Him to stay with them, and when they sit down to dine Jesus is made known to them in the familiar act of the blessing and the breaking of the bread. We think right away of how Jesus is truly present in His Supper, and how He is given to us in the broken bread, but that is not what these disciples were reminded of. They were not there in the upper room Maundy Thursday, for Mark tells us it was only Jesus and the 12. But they might have been there when He fed the multitudes, and were certainly with Him at least once when He acted as host at thousands of meals He shared with His disciples over the past three years. It would have been inconceivable that a Jewish meal would begin without the head of household taking bread, blessing it, breaking and distributing it. Their eyes are opened, and they see Jesus before them, familiar, loving and alive. He vanishes from their sight, and they sit stunned for a moment, reflecting how their hearts burned within them as He opened the Scriptures, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

And now the road was taken at a run. There were people in Jerusalem who needed to know that everything had changed. But when they get to Jerusalem they learn that nearly everything they had said to Jesus was unintended irony!

- 1) Cleopas had asked Jesus whether He is the only stranger to Jerusalem who does not know what has happened. He is no stranger to it; it all had happened to Him, as He had known it would. He had known for all of human history that He would suffer like this, in obedience to the Father, in mercy toward sinners, for the life of the world, and He had shaped all human history to ensure He could and He would.

- 2) They had hoped that Jesus would fulfill the Scripture and ransom Israel. They were right. He would. He did. And they were there to see it. We heard Peter himself tell us earlier today how Israel and all believers in Christ “were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from (their) forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ . . . foreknown before the foundation of the world, but made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Peter 1:18-20)
- 3) Cleopas and his companion had also told the stranger that Peter had searched, but had not seen Jesus. When they burst in on the disciples and blurt out the news the Jesus has risen from the dead, they stand bent over, wheezing and laboring from their three mile run, and over the pounding of their pulses they hear the disciples say, “Yeah, isn’t it great! He has appeared to Simon.”

Everything they thought they knew was turned upside down, and they couldn’t be happier.

And neither could I. For I have been too often on that Emmaus road, feeling nothing but loss, living nothing but grief, and then Jesus came.

He has come to give you what you never would have had if he had not come. Life for death. Life abundant. Blessings and benediction and wonderful surprise. There is nothing and no one that can be taken from you that he cannot give you back.

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