

The Stranger in Jerusalem

Meditation on Luke 24: 13-35

April 30, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles* from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad.* ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth,* who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.* Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah* should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then

their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The little girl with tussled hair greeted her Daddy with a bright smile, but then saw the woman standing near him at the entrance to her preschool. The smile turned to a puzzled look.

"Where is Grandpa Jim?" our granddaughter, Jessie, asked.

Danny, my stepson, answered, "Give Grandma Karen a hug. Grandpa Jim is in the car waiting for you."

Jessie stared at me with a blank expression, before dashing out the door, without her coat. Danny trailed behind, holding her jacket and calling her name. The weather was cool and damp in Cambridge, Mass.

And that's how our visit with our granddaughter began, a couple days after Easter. Though Jim had visited on his own, it had been nearly a year since I had seen Jessie in person. And at only 3 years and 3 months, a year between visits is a long time. She didn't recognize me.

It wouldn't be long, though, till we would be comfortable together. At her home, I sat on the floor with Jessie and we talked as she opened the presents we had brought her. She wanted me to read to her. So I did. She said she was hungry. So I shared the graham crackers I had packed in my suitcase, asking her not to tell Daddy and Mommy that I gave her

snacks. She smiled at our secret, and we ate.

And that was all it took. She knew I was her Grandma, after that. The relationship was renewed--and grew as we spent time together every day. We shared meals and snacks. She popped Cheerios into my mouth, one by one. We read *Peppa Pig Goes Swimming* and *Peppa's Easter Egg Hunt* until she had memorized the words. And we played *Strawberry Shortcake Bingo* and got silly on the couch. My hair became as tussled as Jessie's. We baked a batch of birthday brownies for her Daddy. And we took a long walk to the library before Jessie's parents drove us to the airport on our last day. As they put her into her car seat, she called out, "Grandma Karen! Come sit by me!"

When we tried to say goodbye, she burst into loud sobs and clung to her Mommy. This was not the right end to the story. Grandma and Grandpa were supposed to *stay* with her forever. She didn't want my kiss or hug. Sadness mingled with anger and confusion.

She didn't say goodbye.

The disciples had some similar feelings, perhaps, after they lost Jesus, their beloved teacher, the one who called them brother, sister and friend. They likely experienced shock, grief, sadness, and confusion, in a greater intensity, of course, than Jessie experienced. For the disciples--not just the 12 but "all his acquaintances who had followed him from Galilee"-- in Luke 23:49--had stood on a hill, watching the one the angel had proclaimed in Luke 2:11-- "Savior", "Messiah" and "Lord"--suffer

and die.

This is not how the story was supposed to end, they thought, though Jesus had warned his loved ones what was to come. And the risen Christ will soon explain in full to his disciples gathered in Jerusalem the true meaning of the resurrection. In 24:45-46, he will “open their minds to understand the scriptures,” and he will say, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

But on the evening of the day that a group of women discover Christ’s empty tomb, the disciples don’t know how to feel, what to believe or what to do. They begin to disperse, some of them, leaving Jerusalem at the end of the Feast of the Passover. Some return home.

And Jesus seeks out those struggling with fear and doubt--and not just the original 12 who answered his call. The disciples he pursues in today’s passage are a man named Cleopas, a name that appears nowhere else in the Bible, and another person we are tempted to overlook because he isn’t named. Jesus joins them as they walk 60 *stadia* or 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a village named only in Luke, a place unknown to us today.

“What are you talking about?” Jesus interrupts them, and they don’t answer right away. They stand still, says 24:17, “looking *sad*.” The Greek word translated *sad* (*skythropos*) can also mean angry, such as in Matthew 6:1 when the word describes the “long face” of the fasting Pharisees. Cleopas seems to be mocking Jesus when he asks in v. 18, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things

that have taken place there in these days?”

But it isn't their fault that they don't "see" Jesus, at first. This is all part of God's plan! They are "prevented from recognizing them," says verse 16, a condition that will be reversed in verse 31 after Christ "opens" Scripture to them, teaching them "things concerning himself" says verse 27, "in ALL the Scriptures." Don't miss this important nugget. If you want to learn about Jesus and truly know him, you will find him in the study of ALL the Scriptures--not just the New Testament. They are nourished first on God's Word before the living Christ makes his presence known in the breaking of the bread.

When Jesus asks, "What things?" I hear echoes of his question to his disciples in Matthew 16:13-20, "Who do you say that I am?"

Cleopas doesn't answer like Peter, who, before Jesus' betrayal and death, confidently declares, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Peter will fearfully deny knowing him later on. Cleopas says that Jesus of Nazareth was, "a prophet, a *man* powerful in deed and speech before God and all the people." And he doesn't accept any responsibility for what happened to Jesus. "The chief priests and leaders handed him over," he says in v. 20, and "*they* crucified him."

Jesus is a disappointment to some of his followers. "We had hoped that he was the very one who was going to *liberate Israel*," Cleopas says. With Christ's death and the empty tomb, their world living under Roman oppression is just the same. Or is it?

Reclining at table with the disciples, just as he had in the Last Supper with his 12 disciples, Jesus blesses and breaks the bread--and gives it to them. They recognize him and are not discouraged when he disappears

from their sight. Running the 7 miles back to Jerusalem, though the sun has surely gone down, they proclaim to the other disciples, “The Lord has risen, indeed!”

I have thought of our granddaughter, Jessie, every day since our visit. I feel badly for her tears, though I am sure she has forgotten her sadness by now. We should have prepared her better for our leaving. Yet, at the same time, I know that at 3 years and 3 months, she cannot understand the ways of the world. Waiting even a few months to see us will seem like a long, long time.

We aren't much different than Jessie when it comes to understanding and applying spiritual truths to our lives. We celebrate the empty tomb, the Risen Christ, at Easter, but then we live the next day, as if nothing has changed. If Christ is alive, friends, then everything is changed-- including us! We have new life! We are risen with Him! But we don't want the Spirit to interrupt us as we go on with our lives, seeking what is comfortable and pleasant, rather than seeking to do God's will, which might include some suffering and pain.

I think Luke intentionally leaves out the name of the “other” disciple with Cleopas, who, when Christ wasn't what he hoped he would be, gave up and went home. Luke wants us to see that the disciple without the name is you! It's me!

We need to be reminded, again and again, that we are not alone; we are strengthened and united by Christ's presence when we gather for Word and Sacrament. Christ continually seeks out those who might

wander away from Him in fear, confusion, and doubt.

If that's you on the road to Emmaus, then come back to the Lord, friend! You will find no condemnation -- only love and forgiveness-- with Him. Then let us go out, like the earliest disciples, and proclaim the Good News to all the nations! The Lord is risen, indeed!

Let us pray...

Risen Lord, we thank you for your Spirit that illumines the Scriptures for us -- so that we know the truth and the truth liberates us, sets us free from sin and death. Thank you for your presence in the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. Thank you for seeking out those who have doubts and fears, Lord, revealing yourself to even us, who do not think we are important. Yet we are your children, eternally blessed, loved and forgiven. Strengthen us to do your Will, Lord, and take the paths of righteousness, not comfort and pleasure. Draw us nearer to you. Lead us to proclaim the Good News to all the nations. For Christ is alive! He is risen, indeed! Amen.