

This message is the last in our series of Questions Jesus Asks.

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, **“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”**

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One 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?”

¹⁹**“What things?”** he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but 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. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

²⁵He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶**Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”** ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹But 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.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

³⁶While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, **"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"** ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹And while they still did not believe it, because of joy and amazement, he asked them, **"Do you have anything here to eat?"** ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate it in their presence.

[PRAY]

An episode of the *This American Life* podcast, explored the touching relationship of a single dad, Matt Salyer, and his daughter, Rosie. According to the host of the podcast, "it all started when nine year old Rosie first moved to New York City. Then her grandpa, who she was really close to, died. At the same time, she started at a new school, where the kids either ignored or bullied her, and she felt lost. One day, she came home from school and decided she needed to do something about it." What did Rosie do? She wrote a list of 50 questions!

Then Rosie gave her father the list! Among Rosie's questions were the following:

What did you feel like on your last day of being a child?

In the olden days was everything in black and white?

Where do we go when we die?

Why is there a heaven and hell?

What is love?

And what is the meaning of life?

Rosie explains to the host, "I was lonely... that's when I really, really needed somebody to talk to.... I felt like, oh, this is my dad. He's a really important person. I love him very much. I really want to become closer with him. I wish there was something that I could do to make us closer...so I wrote down all my questions about life..."

Single dad, Matt Salyer, took this assignment very seriously and set out to write detailed answers for each and every one of those questions. But as the podcast episode progressed, we learn that Rosie wasn't looking for answers, as much as she just needed her dad. She longed for a deeper connection with him. Asking her

questions was a way to draw them closer together. (*Ira Glass, "Fermi's Paradox," This American Life (5-19-17)*)

I don't know if this is why Jesus asks a lot of questions, but it makes sense to me! That great theologian, Dr. Phil McGraw, says "past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior". Jesus asked lots of questions during his ministry. The crucified, now risen, Living Lord is asking them still. At least he is consistent! This is one way we know it is Jesus, as he is behaving as usual. In these thirty verses, Jesus asks five questions!

This is the first Easter Sunday. It's been an emotional roller coaster of a week—beginning with the crowds hailing Jesus as king, waving palm branches and shouting Hosannas. All too soon, things deteriorated. After celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus is betrayed, and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. You know "the rest of the story"—mock trials, beating, flogging, crucifixion, burial.

Three long, sad days have gone by. Today is Sunday, Resurrection Day! Cleopas and his companion are deep in grief, trying to make sense of all these traumatic events. They want to believe the women's testimony of the empty tomb, but they are not convinced that Jesus is alive. What does it all mean??

They are deep in conversation as they walk toward Emmaus, when someone approaches. It is the risen Lord! Cleopas and his companion are familiar with Jesus, but they "are prevented" from recognizing him. They "see" him, but they lack clarity. What is that about?

From my personal experience after my mother's sudden death in a traffic accident, I know that grief can numb or dull one's senses. One proceeds as if in a fog, going through the motions of life, but not fully engaged; not really feeling, tasting or seeing. Grief simply overwhelms. Perhaps that is what they are experiencing.

Oliver Sacks is a neurologist and author who has written about how the human brain compensates for different types of blindness. One of his clients, Lilian developed "visual agnosia" late in life. She was able to recognize tiny letters on an eye chart but unable to read words or music, although she was a professional concert pianist. People with "object agnosia" cannot recognize common objects like a car, although they have 20:20 vision. Another condition affects an individual's ability to recognize faces, yet another condition called "deep blindness" involves the loss of one's

interior mental images. (Journey with Jesus, 5.8.2011 Dan Clendenen) Perhaps this is a partial explanation.

Jesus asks: **“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”** (v.17)

This question brings them to a standstill. They are incredulous. How could anyone be ignorant/unaware of recent events in Jerusalem? Now they ask Jesus a question: “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

Surely, if anyone knew, Jesus did! But still, he asks...

¹⁹ **“What things?”** he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people... but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

Cleopas speaks for many who looked to Jesus in hope of rescue, but things did not play out according to their expectations. This tie back to the question we considered last week. Jesus asked the twelve: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter gave the correct answer: “The Messiah, the Son of the Living God” BUT his expectation was the same as that of Cleopas.

“Cleopas sums up the feeling of believers through the ages who conclude that, when God does not fulfill their hopes, all hope is lost.” The concept of a suffering messiah does not compute, because they were looking for one who would come as a conquering hero and liberate them from political oppression and establish God’s kingdom on earth. “They cannot conceive that suffering and death are the necessary means of divine redemption and eternal hope.”

It is ironic that on this walk, “these living disciples talk about a dead Jesus, while a living Jesus speaks with lifeless disciples!” (quotations from J Edwards commentary on Luke p.719-20)

Next Jesus asks: ²⁶**Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?** He asks this rhetorical question, but to be absolutely sure they understand, Jesus proceeds to illuminate and explain the relevant scriptures, informing them that his suffering *is* the suffering of the Messiah. (JE p.720)

The distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus is seven miles, a considerable walk in which these three have had ample time to converse. Sunlight is waning as they

approach their destination, so Cleopas and his companion invite Jesus to stay with them.

In offering hospitality—by inviting Jesus in-- and in sharing this meal something significant happens. *Now the guest/Jesus becomes the host as he breaks the bread, blesses, and shares it with them. Then, in that moment, their eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus true identity—the Risen Lord! He's been present with them all along!*

As a child, my favorite kind of coloring book was one with “dot-to-dot” pictures, but not the simple ones, where it was easy to see what the object was before one even connected the dots. No, I liked the more complex ones with say 50 or 100 dots, because the design was not so obvious. The more dots one accurately connected, more of the picture was revealed.

It seems as if this dynamic is at work here. First the eyes of the disciples were prevented from recognizing Jesus, but now—after Jesus’ instruction and the breaking of bread together—they begin to “connect the dots”--their eyes are opened and they “see” Jesus for who he really is. In this instance, their blindness was not their fault, and now their perception is not their accomplishment. Jesus has revealed enough of himself to make faith possible.

Cleopas and his companion recall the “heart burn” they experienced as Jesus explained the scriptures to them during their walk. It was as if they began to “connect the dots” of the events of the previous week—and the picture becomes clear—that the Messiah had to suffer. What they perceived as the end of hope was actually hope’s beginning! It was all a part of God’s plan of salvation!

The two of them beat feet back—seven miles in the dark--to Jerusalem to share this good news, and they are met with the same good news: Jesus is alive! While there, all together, Jesus appears in their midst. Jesus’ resurrection body clearly lacks some of the limitations of his previous body, but is a new spiritual body that both “participates in space-time dimensions and supersedes them”. (JE, p. 724)

This is demonstrated in his last question: **“Do you have anything here to eat?”** (Remember, Jesus had not eaten since Passover, three days prior. Maybe this is why we call it “the last supper”??) Ghosts or phantoms do not eat!

For a moment, try to put yourself in the sandals of Cleopas or his companion. You have followed in Jesus' footsteps. You are quite familiar with his teachings, his mannerisms, his voice, his face. Yet on this day of all days, they experience a kind of blindness.

Can we be oblivious—blind—to God's presence even when Jesus is walking right alongside us? Like Cleopas and his companion, are we blinded by our mistaken expectations, or by our culture's lies which obscure the reality/truth of God's presence? May our eyes be opened to recognize Jesus today!

I want to close with focusing on Jesus' next to last question in this text:

“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”

The answer is that we are human! If these disciples who knew Jesus personally, in the flesh, who still struggled with faith—how much more do we? Jesus understands. Jesus invites us to trust in him.

“Faith is not a problem of knowledge, nor the banishment of all doubt and uncertainty. Faith is the choice to believe what we know to be true, even in the face of “bewilderment, astonishment, and incredulity”. (JE, p.729)

Do you remember Rosie and her 50 questions? I think Jesus' asking questions gives us permission to value and ask our questions. Faith is a journey, not a destination. Rosie hoped her questions would function to draw her closer to her dad. May our questions draw us closer to our heavenly Father, and to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Everyone is welcome, questions and all.

Let us Pray: Lord, you love us more than we can imagine! Thank you for valuing questions. May our pursuit of answers, draw us ever closer to you and to our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.