

Emmaus Moments

Luke 24:13-35

John Breon

Imagine the sorrow of these disciples as they drag their feet all the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Suddenly Jesus is with them, “but they are kept from recognizing him.”

Jesus could have rushed up to them exclaiming, “It’s me! It’s me! It’s over! I’m back! We won! It’s me!” Instead, he walked with them, talked with them, went into the house at their invitation and sat at the table with them—until *they* said, “It’s you! It’s you!” (Bob Benson, *In Quest of the Shared Life* 46)

In this account we first see *Christ’s patience in pursuing us*. “He walked with them.” Jesus walks with us down all the roads of our lives. He walks with us before we know him.

God takes the first step toward us. God loves us before we respond (Rom 5:8). The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and draws us to God. Left to ourselves, we would naturally go away from God forever. But the Spirit restrains us, frees us and empowers us to turn to God. This is an aspect of God’s grace working in us.

God uses various means, circumstances and people as instruments of grace. God can use Scripture, conscience, church, family, witnesses, our hungry hearts. I’ve shared before how I experienced God’s grace in my early life. I grew up in a Christian home. The church was always a big part of our lives. I can’t remember when I didn’t have an awareness of God. Once when I visited another church with a friend, they showed an evangelistic film and the pastor gave an invitation. My friend asked me, “Have you ever been saved?” I didn’t know what to say then, but I started thinking about what that meant. I talked with my parents and asked them about their experiences, when they had been baptized and what that meant to them. I was seeking.

Again, Jesus walks with us before we recognize him. And, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, often we fail to recognize him when we need him the most.

What roads has Christ walked with you? How have you seen him in your life?

Jesus gets these disciples to tell him the gospel, to relate his own story. And they summed it up as best they could, as far as they knew the story. But their knowledge was incomplete.

What Jesus does for these disciples begins with the *Scriptures*. If they had remembered and believed the words of Jesus, they would have understood and believed the report of the women about the empty tomb. This is why the still-unrecognized Jesus calls them “foolish and slow of heart to believe.” He corrects their misunderstanding of the Messiah. He explains to them the Scriptures concerning himself. He explains how Messiah first had to suffer and then enter his glory.

It says he began with “Moses and all the Prophets” and explained to them what was said in “all the Scriptures” about himself. Later, when the risen Jesus appears to another group of disciples in Jerusalem, he talks about the fulfillment of what was written about him “in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (v 44). We meet the living Lord in many ways, including worship and personal experience. But a primary place we meet Jesus is in the Bible. He is the living Word who speaks to us and comes to us through the written Word. We can only understand what has happened with Jesus in light of the Scriptures. And we can only understand the Scriptures in light of what has happened with Jesus. They inform each other.

Jesus walked with them all the way to Emmaus. He went in at their invitation. He sat at their table. Then he took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to them.

“Then it happened...” (v 31 PHILLIPS). Their eyes were opened and they recognized him when he broke the bread. There was a *sacramental* dimension to the experience. Jesus revealing himself to them during a meal reminds us of many times in Luke’s Gospel when Jesus had table fellowship with all kinds of people. He identified with and showed loyalty to all kinds of people—including social outcasts. He taught and revealed much about God’s kingdom during those meals.

For the two disciples who had met him on the road, this was *the moment of revelation and recognition*. We could call it an “Emmaus moment.” That’s when the living Lord bursts upon us revealing himself and letting us know he is more than enough to meet our deepest needs. And we realize who he is and what he can do in us. We can experience this many times on our journey.

We can experience Emmaus type moments any time, any place. God is constantly seeking to reveal himself to us—if only we would be aware. One reason God awaits our recognition is to allow room for faith.

Some of these moments in my life are when I prayed, “Jesus come into my heart” when I was almost 12 years old. A couple of years later, I prayed, “Lord, fill me with your Spirit.” I continue to experience this kind of moment sometimes in prayer or worship or making a decision.

We’ve been involved in something that’s designed to help people experience Emmaus kind of moments. It’s a program called “The Walk to Emmaus” based on this passage in Luke and sponsored by the Upper Room (the folks who publish a popular devotional book). It begins with a weekend Walk to Emmaus, usually held at a retreat center or church or camp, starting on Thursday evening and ending on Sunday afternoon. It includes worship, daily communion, a “short course on basic Christianity” in a series of talks by lay people and pastors, discussion and interaction in small groups, and lots of food, fun and laughter. The initial weekend is then followed up with ongoing small groups called Reunion Groups, larger gatherings of participants, and helping with future weekend Walks.

Nancy and I first experienced “Walk to Emmaus” when we were on seminary internship in Texas. We have since worked and helped with it in various ways in different places. It’s amazing how God works in these weekends and how people receive just what they need from God.

The weekend is a renewing and refreshing time. It’s intended for people who are already Christians and involved in church, to renew faith and strengthen discipleship. But people meet Christ there or find forgiveness or healing for old emotional wounds. Many experience God’s love and grace in a personal way like they never have before. Nearly

everyone who takes part is renewed and encouraged in their daily walk with the Lord.

Do you remember when you first had an Emmaus type experience? You realized who Christ is and you gave yourself to him. How has he revealed himself most recently? Have you realized his presence in your life in a particular need?

This revelation and recognition may come in a flash of inspiration or gradually. It's not so important how it happens, but that it happens.

One person might leave the window shades open at night, and in the morning sunlight slowly fills the room. Another person might throw open the shades in the morning and light suddenly pours in. But by noon both rooms are just as bright and full of light.

Wonderful as our experience is, God deals with us as individuals. We don't need to try to force everyone into our experience.

There's an old story about a drunk who fell in a well on his way home one night. After crying and screaming and praying he was finally rescued. That experience changed his life. He gave his life to God and quit drinking. He wanted everyone to experience what he had. So he would get take people out, get them drunk, push them in the well, wait a while and then pull them out.

While we don't try to force our experience on others, we can learn from others' experiences.

For example, there's John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. He grew up in a pastor's home and learned the Bible and faith from his earliest days. In 1725 he resolved to "make God the business of his life" and then was ordained as a minister. But he continued to struggle with a fear of death and a lack of assurance that he really was a Christian.

But he was seeking, talking with others who had assurance of salvation, and was doing all he knew to do. And then, on May 24, 1738, he went "very unwillingly to a society [small group] meeting on Aldersgate Street" in London. Someone was reading from Martin Luther's preface to Romans. Wesley wrote in his journal:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone, for salvation. And an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

What had been a general belief for Wesley became a personal faith and experience. This was part of a process in Wesley's life. He continued occasionally to struggle with doubts and fears, but his life and ministry were never the same. This experience and its results in Wesley's life soon led to the Revival that swept England and was the beginning of Methodism.

Here's another example. I once read about a man named V. H. Wilson, who received Christ and was baptized when he was ninety-seven years old. His pastor wrote that V and his sister Beulah Lee, who was several years younger, were both baptized and took the vows of church membership that day. They had been loyal supporters of the church for many years but had never joined. V came forward when the invitation was given and Beulah soon followed. The pastor and congregation were wonderfully and gloriously surprised. There was hardly a dry eye in the place as they sang "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" and welcomed V and Beulah into the church's fellowship. The pastor concludes: "We must have faith and never underestimate the value of the invitation to Christian discipleship. For four years I gave the invitation and V and Beulah didn't respond. However, on this second Sunday of my fifth year, V came forward and said, 'I do love Jesus and I need forgiveness. I have been intending to do this for a long time'" (Dan Sullivan, Letter to the Editor, MO West UM Review, August 2, 1991 12).

Let's see the results of the encounter in the two Emmaus disciples. *Warm hearts*. Their hearts burned within them as Jesus talked with them and explained the Scriptures. This experience was not only scriptural and sacramental, it was *spiritual*.

One day I had conversations with several people who each described being *numb*—emotionally, from shock and disappointment, or physically. What about our numbness—of heart, of mind?

One man described a church conference he attended as, "Dull, dull, deadly dull. Dull people arguing about dull resolutions" to keep a dull institution going (Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Ask Him Anything* 138).

Apart from encountering the risen Lord we remain numb, cold, unfeeling, dull. But Jesus warms our hearts, melts the coldness, and softens our hard resistance. We can begin to feel, to lose our numbness. We come alive. Christ replaces our dullness with his dynamic life in us.

At the close of an Emmaus Walk weekend I was on, a man pointed to his chest and said, "There's a fire in here."

When that fire is in our hearts we become what one writer called "the fellowship of the flaming heart" (Ogilvie 139). We're united in our experience of the living Lord. The warmth of love from others warms our hearts and sets us free to return that love and pass it on to still others.

Not only were their hearts on fire, *they ran to tell others* (v 33). I imagine they raced back to Jerusalem. They received affirmation from the other disciples. They shared their own experience. Evangelism is telling others that Jesus is alive and we've seen him, we've experienced him. Someone is waiting to hear it from you.

I once heard about two brothers who lived in cities far from where they had grown up. They hadn't seen each other in quite a while, so they decided to get together and go visit the place where they had lived as boys. They each flew into a nearby city, then rented a car and drove together out to the little town and then on out into the country. They found the farm. The old house was still standing, though it was abandoned. They climbed a fence and walked across a field to get to it.

They walked up the creaky steps and across the sagging porch. When they went in, memories flooded their minds. They climbed the ladder to the loft where their room had been and remembered talking and laughing at bedtime until their father would say, "That's enough! You boys go on to sleep or I'll have to come up there."

In the living room, they stopped by the mantle. A brick was missing from above the fireplace. One of them said, "Remember how Dad would keep his Bible and glasses here? Each evening we would sit around him

while he read to us from the Bible?" The other said, "Yes, and then we would kneel and Mom would pray with us."

Then one of the brothers said that as he had left home and gotten busy in the world, he had left behind the faith of their childhood. He'd had experiences that made him question what they had been taught and then he just didn't have time for God.

The other said that he too had gone through some things that challenged his faith, but he had decided to trust God, to keep seeking him and that he still knew the God their parents had introduced them to. He told his brother that it was not too late for him to turn back to God and put his faith in Jesus. Then he said, "I wonder if we could kneel here one more time and pray." His brother agreed. Two brothers—one a Christian and one not—knelt there to pray where they had prayed so many times before. Then two Christians got up and walked out to face their future.

He comes to us in so many ways—
Warmth when we are cold,
Fellowship when we are alone,
Strength when we are weak,
Peace when we are troubled,
Courage when we are afraid,
Songs when we are sad
And bread when we are hungry.

He is with us on our journeys. He is there when we are home. He sits with us at our table. He knows about funerals and weddings and commencements and hospitals and jails and unemployment and labor and laughter and rest and tears. He knows because He is with us. He comes to us again and again—until we can say, "It's You! It's You!" (Benson, *Quest* 50)

Have you recognized Jesus walking with you, working in your life?
Have you responded to him with faith and trust? Wouldn't you like to be able to look back to this day and say, "*Then it happened in my life*"?

Have you joined the fellowship of those who know him?
Is there someone to whom you need to run with the Good News?

It seems Jesus would have gone on past Emmaus if they had not invited him in. He longs to come in and fill your life. But he waits for your faith, your invitation. Won't you welcome him into your life today?