

Wake

Our story this morning begins with “on that same day” which is actually Easter Sunday. It’s important to see that this passage is directly connected to our story from two weeks ago on Easter Sunday. As you may recall, the disciples (the women and men) were not overly eager in their beliefs that Jesus had truly been raised from the dead. The women went to the tomb, not with breakfast in hand to await the risen savior, but with spices to embalm the dead. That even the empty tomb did not convince them that Jesus had been resurrected. And after the angels told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead the women ran back to tell the men about what had happened and what the angels had told them, but the men did not believe, right? They thought it was an idle tale, that the women were delirious. But Peter ran to the empty tomb anyway and, as we discussed on Easter, he walked away amazed or shaking his head (depending on the translation), but even that does not necessarily mean that he believed. And so, up to this point, Easter has been less a story about the outlandish resurrection of Jesus and more about people who didn’t believe the outlandish resurrection of Jesus.

And so here we are, as Luke puts it “on that same day.” But now, instead of rising, the sun has begun to set when we meet two more followers of Jesus who are not, it seems, that much different from any of the other disciples we encountered earlier in the day. They have heard what happened earlier on this Easter Day, but it has not given them any more faith than their predecessors. Even before they open their mouths to the stranger it’s pretty clear they don’t believe the radical claim of the resurrection. How do we know this? Well first of all because they’re walking away from Jerusalem. I’m pretty sure they didn’t hear the claim of the resurrection and then say, “Wow, that’s amazing, Jesus was raised from the dead. How incredible?! Alright, we’re going to head on home now.” No, if you hear something like that you’re thinking, “Wow, let’s go find him! You’re going out and searching his old haunts, right? Jesus loved Bub’s let’s go see if he’s there or Jesus can’t get enough Goonies, so let’s go check the movie theater.” (It just so happens that Jesus likes the same things I do!) Wherever it is, you’re out looking for him, not just kind of slinking away from Jerusalem and back home.

And so it is that these two disciples are headed to Emmaus, probably shuffling their feet, in no real hurry. Perhaps their conversation went back and forth quickly at times and then times of silence as they pondered what had happened and what had gone wrong. The stranger may have been walking with them for some time really. It’s easy in these moments to get so caught up in one’s own thoughts that the world around you is a blur, if it’s there at all.

And then they notice the stranger. Now we’re told that they were kept from seeing it was Jesus and perhaps this is because Jesus used his miraculous powers to keep

them from seeing who he really was. Honestly though, while I do think Jesus may have looked a bit different post-resurrection than pre-resurrection, I really think that their inability to see who it was, was not so much about something Jesus was doing and more about the simple fact that their grief and confusion made them simply unable to see what was right in front of their eyes. Any of us who have grieved or gone through times of depression can tell you that it has a way of distorting everything that's around you, of making even the most beautiful of sunrises or sunsets, look dull, uninteresting, uninspiring.

And so through this gray filter they look at the stranger who asks, "What it is that you are talking about." And I love how Luke bluntly describes the two disciples at this point. "They stood still, looking sad." It is a remarkable picture that describes, not just their exterior, but their interior as well. They're stuck, with no sense of direction. And they're so down, so sad, so despondent, that they can't even hide it. This past week, our middle daughter has had a lot of tearful incidents and quite a few times when she is just standing there with her bottom lips fully protruded and quivering. As I stood looking at her this week, I couldn't help but picture these two disciples looking very much the same way. While we often get better at hiding this as we age, there are grief's so great, that we simply cannot hide them.

And so they say, my guess is with some incredulity (and an amazing amount of irony), "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been going on the last few days?" And so Jesus, who I picture eating all this up, says somewhat coyly, "Um . . . what things?" It's a fascinating way to hear what the disciples are thinking, how they're understanding what's going on, how they're interpreting what has happened.

The disciples, with great boldness really, went on to describe to Jesus everything that had happened to, well, Jesus, including the fact that three days have since passed since his death and that though the women reported that angels had said Jesus was alive and though the men had found the tomb empty, they had not yet seen Jesus. And the words which perhaps rang loudest in the stranger's ears were these: "We had hoped (*had* hoped) that he was the one to redeem Israel."

And like a batter seeing the perfect fastball to hit out of the park, Jesus jumps on what they said with great rapidity, explaining and interpreting anew from Moses to Easter Day exactly what was happening and why it had happened. And when he was done, I can't help but think that the two disciples stood there with their mouths somewhat agape, in awe of what they had just heard, their minds racing to and fro as they absorbed what Jesus was saying. And at this point Jesus, we're told, begins to act like he's going to go further along. It's probably not important but I've often wondered how he did that? Did he lace up his sandals or get out a map or put on his headlamp. Anyway, at this point, with the passion of a child pleading to get his parents to let him stay up later, the disciples begin to almost beg Jesus to stay with them. C'mon, don't leave. Look it's getting late, the mosquitos are starting to bite . . .

Whatever they said, it was convincing because Jesus folded up his map, turned off the headlamp and headed inside with them.

As they sit down at the table and prepare to eat the meal that the disciples had prepared, my guess is that the disciples were excited to keep talking, to keep listening to how the stranger understood scripture. They couldn't wait to learn more about what this interesting stranger had to say to them. As they sat down with him, perhaps for the first time, they really looked at him. Rather than walking side by side with him and glancing at him from time to time, they were there, looking at him intently. And, somewhat strangely, *he* took the bread, he blessed it, he broke it and he gave it to them. And in that moment, they recognized him. In that moment, the scales of grief and depression fell from their eyes. And before they could say anything, before they could grab hold of him, he was gone. Can't you imagine them looking at the empty chair and then at one another and then back at the chair again. Before you know it they're talking about how they had a sneaky suspicion it was him all along, all the while they're strapping their sandals on and, with no thought of mosquitos or the setting sun, they take off back to Jerusalem. For the first time, they really believe that the impossible has been made possible, and when you believe that, there's no way to keep it to yourself. So, they run back, only to discover that others in their community had also seen Jesus. Can't you imagine the scene of celebration and the rejoicing?!

Now, when it comes to this story, one of the most fascinating parts is clearly the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Luke allows us, the reader, to know from the beginning that it is the resurrected Jesus who is walking beside the two disciples, and we get to watch and snicker as the disciples make fools of themselves by their inability to see who is walking beside them. All of the walking and discussion and pleading and inviting, of course, are a crescendo, the build-up, to the climax of the story when they finally see that Jesus is alive, truly risen from the dead.

And that is a fine and reasonable reading of the story. The one problem though with reading the story like that is that it allows the focus to be so strongly on what comes at the end, the extraordinary revelation of the risen savior, that we end up almost forgetting everything that built up to it. To put it another way, we look so hard at the end, at the extraordinary, that we end up losing sight of the ordinary (the walking, talking and inviting) that got them to the extraordinary. And in many ways when we do that, we lose the real power of this story for us today.

Since I am new here I have been the recipient of a lot of questions. Questions like, "How did you end up with someone as beautiful as Megan?" Perhaps though the question I have been asked more than any other is "Tell us about your move from Pentecostalism to Presbyterianism?" Clearly this is not a typical transition and, for understandable reasons, people are interested in hearing about it.

Oftentimes when we talk about these things, we end up focusing on the differences between Pentecostal and Presbyterian worship. If Presbyterians stand up for more

than 10 minutes in a service you can see them looking around with a bit of confusion and even anger in their faces, wondering why they even have chairs if they can't use them. Meanwhile, if Pentecostals sit down for more than 10 minutes in a service they begin to wonder why in the world they have legs if they can't use them. Whereas Presbyterian services often focus on the head, Pentecostals tend to focus on the heart. Presbyterians like the mantra, "decent and in order" while Pentecostals are drawn to the spontaneous and mysterious.

At times people also like to talk about how the Pentecostals seem to be growing so much, while Presbyterians seem to be dwindling. There are, of course, lots of theories as to why this is. Is it the fact that they speak in tongues or that they raise their hands in worship or that they occasionally run the aisles. Most of these theories focus on the extraordinary aspect of Pentecostals, especially Pentecostals at worship. But as I've thought about it more, and as I've reflected on my own upbringing, I really think it has little to do with what they do in Sunday worship that has made the Pentecostals such a growing, lively church.

I think what makes the faith of so many Pentecostals so alive and attractive to so many is, ironically enough, what happens the other days of the week, during the ordinary parts of their lives. Which is that, at least in my experience, most Pentecostals have a real belief, a real expectation, that the risen savior, Jesus the Christ, is going to show up in some way in their ordinary days. They wake up with a palpable sense that Jesus is alive and at work and at any moment in some surprising way, he is going to reveal himself, not necessarily in any extraordinary or flash way, but in the absolutely ordinary. And when Pentecostals gather on Sundays what they often do is give testimony, not just to what happened during a worship service, but to how they saw Jesus work in their lives during the week, during their ordinary days.

Just like those two disciples walking to Emmaus, Pentecostals grasp that Jesus might show up while they're walking in their neighborhood or in an encounter with a stranger or when they invite someone into their home or when they are having a meal with somebody. I mean imagine what life was like for those two disciples after they realized that it was Jesus who had been walking alongside of them that whole trip to Emmaus. Every single day when they got up, they now knew and believed that Jesus could show up in the most unexpected of places, but in the most ordinary of ways. How would their lives be different? How might their faith be more alive? It changes the way you see things, the way you live, the way you plan, when you realize that the risen savior can pop up at any time, not just on Sunday mornings when everyone gathers to worship, but any time of the day and any time of the week.

And so the point of the Emmaus story is not just what happens at the end, but what has been happening the whole time, which is that Jesus has been with them, but they were simply blind to it. What may have seemed like a meaningless walk back home or an ordinary conversation with a stranger, turned into so much more. One of the

points of the Emmaus story (and perhaps something we can learn from Pentecostals) is that we have to begin realizing that Jesus is alive around us and that we should be looking for the ways that he is working in our everyday, ordinary encounters. I am convinced that our lives will look different when we begin to expect to see Christ.

Now, when I thought about this passage and this sermon, I initially thought that this would be a good place to end. But as I thought about it more, I realized that there was actually just a bit more to be said. Because one of the things that dawned on me this week is not just that we have to expect to see the risen savior in even the most ordinary of ways, but that we have to be aware that we have opportunities each day to allow others to experience the risen savior.

I've only been here for four months, but even in that short timespan, I have grown to really love something. I'm not talking about the church or our new home, no this is much deeper than that. I'm talking about beer bread. Wow, am I right?! I bring that up because this week someone graciously, out of the blue, brought us a meal that included the beer bread that they knew I loved. In one sense, of course, this is just ordinary bread and perhaps a kind, but ordinary act. But after the person who gave it to us left I said to Megan, "You know, they really are a gracious, giving people." As I thought about it I realized I was talking about this family, but also this church family. We as a family have moved into your neighborhood (so to speak), talked to a lot of you who were strangers, been invited into many of your homes and already broken bread, beer bread and lots of dessert together. And one thing I want you to know, is that while those acts may seem to you like ordinary acts, for us as the Deck family, they have been experienced as acts of Christ; acts in which we have caught glimpses of Jesus. And I think it's important for you all to know that. Not to flatter you, but to let you know that what you are doing when you do these things, is more than just being kind, you are sharing the grace of the resurrected Savior. And in so doing you change people, because one cannot come into contact with the acts of a risen savior and not be changed. It's vital that you realize that you have been and must continue to be a people who show others Jesus, not simply in the extraordinary, but in the ordinary ways that you allow yourself to be taken, blessed, broken, blessed and given to others.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as we said on Easter morning the resurrection is an outlandish and remarkable event. But the opportunities we have to experience that and to help others experience it, come so often through remarkably ordinary events. I encourage you this week to go out expecting to see Jesus, not in the extraordinary, but in the ordinary. But don't stop there. Go out from this place, expecting that there will be ways in which, through ordinary acts of love and grace, you can help others to experience the resurrected savior. Because when we can be a people who go out from this place seeing Jesus and allowing others to see Jesus through us, then we cannot but help, just like those travelers to Emmaus, to gather together joyfully, celebrating the extraordinary reality that Jesus is raised from the dead. May it be so. Amen.