

IT IS SOLVED (MAYBE) BY WALKING

Luke 24:13-35

According to Luke's gospel, it is a seven mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus—give or take. If I huff it in my super-cushioned *Brooks Glycerine* sneakers, I average about 4 miles per hour. Cutting the sandal-wearing disciples some slack, I figure it took them anywhere between 2 ½ to 3 hours to make the journey. Plenty of time to let their minds and hearts wander and talk about what happened in the last three days—how Jesus was crucified, how he was wrapped in grave clothes, anointed with oil and spices and laid in a tomb, and how some had reported that they had seen him just recently, alive and well.

They were sure puzzled. And so they did what St. Augustine a few hundred years later would famously call *solvitur ambulando*—it is solved by walking. Over the centuries, many famous and not so famous people have tried just that—solve whatever troubled, ailed or stumped them by walking around. Whether Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, William Blake or J.K. Rowling (of Harry Potter fame), Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Bill Bryson, many have tried. And even the grumpy German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had to admit, “All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.”

However, walking did not do the trick for the disciples. Even after Jesus shows up in the flesh and walks alongside them, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him,” the text says. Even after Jesus begins to question them about what had happened and after they engage in conversation with him, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” And even after he interprets all the scriptures for them, beginning with Moses and including all the prophets, they are still at a loss as to what happened. So much for solving their dilemma on their three-hour walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

It is somewhat comforting to me that the interpretation of scripture is such an arduous task. Jesus himself is teaching the disciples here a master class in exegesis, which is just a fancy word for “getting something out of reading the bible.” It's what people like Doug, Courtney and I have been taught in seminary courses, and

what people like us in turn try to hand on to the congregations we serve. But who are we kidding, really? If even Jesus cannot make us understand “what Moses and the prophets meant,” who are we to think we are able to accomplish this?

All our elegant theologies, bible studies and creeds over the last two-thousand years have not been enough to help us move one inch closer to the risen Christ. My liturgy professor told us in class one day, “we fight so fiercely about our theologies because so little is at stake.” I think I finally understand what he meant to say, which is ... whenever we meet someone who tells us he or she knows what God is thinking, we had better run as fast as we can in the other direction because we are not dealing with God’s word but an ideology. Whenever we meet someone who wants to exclude from rather than invite others into the fellowship with the risen Christ, we are dealing with an ideology and not with the risen Christ. And whenever a group or denomination is trying to seize power in order to control others, we surely are dealing with an ideology because the risen Christ commands us “to lay down our lives for others,” for those who are unlike us. Oppressing others in Christ’s name is never a sign of divine favor. Rather, it diminishes the only one who can bring life out of death.

I think the disciples could not solve their Jesus-problem on the road to Emmaus because of several reasons. First, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” as “they had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.” They could not recognize Jesus because his death had traumatized them. They were so shocked that their expectations of who he needed to be for them and what he needed to do for them were left in tatters. I know how confused and disoriented I was at times in my life, when my plans were blown to smithereens, and how long it took me to regain some semblance of clarity. I am sure anybody in this sanctuary here today can remember a time in their life when “what was hoped for” came to naught, and our eyes were kept from recognizing new possibilities, new life, resurrection life and hope.

And secondly, the disciples could not solve their dilemma by walking because, ultimately, Jesus’s resurrection is not a problem to be solved. It is a mystery which needs to be entered into, a mystery which needs to be encountered. What do I mean by that? I mean that in order for our eyes to be opened and to recognize the Risen One, we need a revelation. Jesus needs to make himself known to us, or in other

words, revelation is a one-way street. And he makes himself known to us not in complicated biblical interpretations or highfalutin theologies, but in a simple, ordinary, daily act. Eating. And not just by eating alone, but by eating *with* others, by participating in a communal meal. “When he was at table with them, he took bread, and he blessed it and broke it.” Only then were their eyes opened and they recognized him.

There might not be a more radical expression of faith in today’s polarized and evermore polarizing world than the mere fact that we get together on a regular basis in order to eat together. We do this once a month in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, one of the two sacraments our faith tradition recognizes. A sacrament signifies, in John Calvin’s words, “an outward and visible sign of God’s invisible grace.” So, every time we eat this bread and we drink this cup, when we smell the bread (or the gluten-free crackers) and taste the grape juice, Jesus is actually in our midst.

But that’s not where it stops. Our tradition has also allowed for events which have sacramental character, events where we assemble in Christian fellowship: like the Lenten breakfasts, our Strawberry Festival and Rally Day picnic, the women’s luncheons or the men’s Grill and Chill events, the Easter egg hunt, even our dinners at home with our families and friends. All of these are outward and visible signs that the gracious and risen Christ is among us.

And so my Easter wish for all of us is that every time we sit down to eat together in whatever setting we may find ourselves, our eyes would be opened and we might recognize that the risen Lord is indeed in our midst.

However, while the mystery of the resurrection will never be solved by walking, many things really can be. If you haven’t tried it, give it a go. The weather has been beautiful lately. So, lace up your walking shoes! It’s worth it.

Amen.