

The Road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-35

I was watching a documentary the other evening entitled, “When Jews Were Funny”. It talked about how so many people in Hollywood were and are Jewish. It explored Jewish comics and how the comics of today are so different from those of a generation ago. Remember names like Henny Youngman, Jackie Mason, Buddy Hackett, Danny Kay, Don Rickles, Gene Wilder, Jack Benny, George Burns? All Jews. Adam Sandler, Jerry Seinfeld, Bette Middler, Billy Crystal, Gilda Radner, Goldie Hawn – also Jewish comics. One of the characteristic of Jewish people, at least according to these comics, is that nothing is ever good enough. They are always complaining. Enough is never enough, shiny is never shiny enough, big is never big enough. They find that an endearing trait.

Now during this documentary, these comics maintained that all any of them had to do in order to make the others laugh, was simply say a word or two from the punch line of a joke, and the others would laugh

hysterically. They would all know the joke so well and would play the joke quickly in their heads, and break up. For example, “He had a hat”. That would be enough to get a room full of Jewish comics laughing hysterically. Do you know that joke? Would you care to hear it? (Jewish mother at the beach with her only son. Having a great time. Huge wave comes up and drags him into the ocean and swallows him up. His mother screams for him... she races into the ocean to try to save him, eventually she gives up, knowing she is never going to see him again. She begins to pray. Dear Lord forgive me I pray, for all the horrible things I have done, and said, and thought. I will do anything you ask of me, please just return my only son, alive. Within moments, a huge wave rolls up onto the shore spitting out her beloved son, coughing and spitting, but certainly alive. His mother races over and hugs him and holds him and tells him how worried she had been and how thankful she is that he is alive. Then she looks up into the sky and says to God, “He had a hat”. They all know the story well. They need just share a few words, and the rest of them all get it!

One comedian says two words. "Jump in". That's all they needed. They had heard it so many times before. And all the comics start to laugh.

A Jewish couple have been retired for many years. The lady of the house hears the familiar sound of the Garbage truck roaring down the street. She has a bag of garbage in her hand and rushes for the door, trying to get her garbage out there before the truck is gone. She calls to her husband, "Am I too late for the garbage?" "No", he says, "take a good run at it and jump in."

"Now on that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus....". That's all you need to hear right? You know the story. You know the characters and what is going to happen. You know how this one ends.

But do you? You may get the jist of the story, but there are some details herein that are very important if we are to learn something significant about the nature of God and our relationship with God.

Sometimes we don't read carefully. Sometimes we have heard the story so many times before that we don't listen well. Sometimes there are some details missing so we just make them up ourselves.

Were the two people walking down the road men?

Were they disciples?

How do you know that? Nothing specifies their gender or that they were Jesus' disciples.

And what do we mean by disciple anyway? Well, one of the twelve I suppose. Not necessarily. Scholars tell us that there were many disciples.....followers of, or students of Jesus. Verse 33 says that the two who had been walking down the road with him, got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together." So if the 11 – (12-Judas) were together in Jerusalem. These two walking down the road with the risen Christ were obviously not part of the 12 disciples we usually think of.

But these two were disciples in the larger sense of the word – students, followers, other men and women – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women. Remember on what we now call Easter Sunday morning, some of them went to the tomb and found that it was empty, ‘just as the women had said’. So it could have been 2 women who were walking down that road that day, except we do find out that the name of one of them was Cleopas which we assume to be male. But we never find out the gender of the other one. But I don’t think that is how we generally hear or imagine this story. The point is, I don’t think we think about any of this very hard. We assume these two were part of the original 12. We assume that these two were both men. These elements of the story are significant. We know the story and we know how it ends. It is, sadly, too often, all about the punch line. We miss some important elements in the middle.

The story is about the fact that these two people are downcast because the crucifixion of Christ had just taken place. They put him in a tomb

and then the body had disappeared – vanished. They had no idea who this man was who walked with them. They are shocked that He did not know what had just happened in Jerusalem, so they bring him up to speed.

They ask Him to stay the night and share their accommodation with them. He agrees. It is time to have dinner. He takes the bread, blesses it, and breaks it. Immediately He vanishes. Immediately they get it! Immediately they know who that was. They could not believe they had not recognized Him. Within the hour they headed back to tell the others, the eleven, what had just happened.

Apart from knowing that ‘disciple’ means men and women beyond the scope of the 12, and beyond appreciating that women were a significant part of his early followers, there are two points I want to make today regarding this passage of a story we know so well.

The first point is this - **Jesus seeks us.** Those two disciples walking down the road that day....they knew who Jesus was. They knew a lot

about Him. They had seen all those things, good and bad, that happened in Jerusalem. They were taught by Him. Yet they did not recognize Him.

Are you curious about verse 16? ‘...their eyes were kept from recognizing Him’. One theologian I read, suggested that it was yet another lesson from God in trusting...in having faith....in believing, even though we cannot see. The disciples had been told about these events many times, yet, not unlike Thomas, they had not chosen to believe.

They just did not get it!

The disciples had a pre-conceived idea about who Jesus was, what He had come to do, and how He would do it. But when things did not turn out like they thought they should, they dismissed the whole thing as a mere failure, as misplaced hope and trust. Sometimes God does not look or sound or act like we suppose He should. The members of The Shack study group certainly know that! Can you relate? Can you even dare to imagine that God is not confined by our imaginations or beliefs?

We talk about a mustard seed of faith. We imagine that if we had been part of the original band of disciples, we would have had great faith, wheel barrow loads of faith. We would listen to what He taught. We would understand. We would believe. We know for sure that if we had been one of those 2 walking down that road to Emmaus, we would have known it was Him! Perhaps....

These 2 disciples just had mustard seed faith. They had heard the reports of the women who went to the tomb. That they had found it empty. They had seen the empty tomb for themselves. But here they were – walking down the road with the risen Christ....and they did not recognize Him.

The two disciples knew that something had happened, but it was beyond their level of faith to see things as they truly were. Beyond their mustard seed faith to believe.

I thank God that it is not up to us. That Jesus seeks us!

The second and final thing I want to say is this – it comes from verse 31,

“Then their eyes were open and they recognized Him.”

For these two disciples it was the blessing and the breaking of the bread. What has it been, or what might it be for you.....the love of a child, the forgiveness of someone you’ve wronged, the compassion of a stranger....What is it going to take for you, and for me, to open our eyes, and recognize that God is with us?

Downtown this week I saw a man sitting in the middle of the sidewalk on Sussex street. He was begging. He was not dressed warm enough for the day. He had bare feet. His arms were outstretched. I was in my car, stopped at a light. I saw many well dressed, well fed, well employed people walk past him. Most did not even acknowledge him nor his pleas for help. All of a sudden a young gal stopped and handed him a \$5.00 bill. I venture to say that it made a difference to him and to

her. I know it made a difference to me. Are you trying to see God? Are you trying to open your eyes wide enough for that?

When our eyes get opened, even for a moment, we want to help others get theirs' open. We want them to see Jesus, or God, or the Holy Spirit.

We want them to see, and to experience Love. We want them to go forth, with whatever measure of faith we might have....to show kindness, generosity, compassion, patience.....

I hope this world gets better at knowing who it is that is walking down the road with us. I hope you do. I hope I do.

May God bless us on our journey!

Amen