

The Road to Emmaus

On the first Sunday of Lent I preached on the topic of Palm Sunday. (Slide #1) Throughout Lent, I preached on the events that took place between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. (Slide #2)

That haunting image of that Friday night is so easily accessible! The 3 crosses, dark and angular against the sky. So powerful.

The next day, Saturday, is sad, quiet, no energy, no hope.... I'm sure you have had days like that.

And then the next day, Sunday....Easter Sunday! Mary and some of the other women race to the empty tomb. (Slide #3) It is empty. In one Gospel, she speaks to the gardener. (Slide #4) It is not until he speaks to her, that she knows it is the risen Christ. The women race back and tell the men that the tomb is empty. They can't believe it. They have to go and see for themselves. Peter and some of the others race to the cemetery to verify what the women have said. Can you imagine what was going on in all of their minds? The wonder, the disbelief, the longing to believe, the confusion, the possibility.....Sunday was a very big day. It was a whirlwind.

But 2 of the disciples can't take it. They need a break. They need to get out of there. It's all too much. They need to get away from the others. So they escape. (Slide #5) They head out on the dusty road to a small nothing little place called Emmaus, 7 miles away.

I wonder if you ever felt like these two? Have you ever just needed to leave? Take a walk....walk it off....get a change of scene...even for a moment. Something to ease your mind and your heart. These two disciples needed to do this.....to talk over, perhaps a million times, what they knew, what they had experienced, what He had told them, what had happened....again and again re-hashing it all...trying to make sense of it, trying to decide their next move, what to do now, where to go.... With someone else or by yourself have you ever been in the shoes of these two disciples? Have you?

Emmaus could be just a walk around the block, or a trip to the movies, or to the store to buy something you need or you don't need. It could even be going to church on Sunday. Emmaus can be where you go to forget. Emmaus can be where you go to remember. Emmaus can be where you go to make sense of it.

Two men walk along a dusty road to a town of little consequence. They become aware of footsteps approaching them from behind. It is a stranger.

He asks them what they are talking about. They are shocked to think that he has not heard what has just taken place in Jerusalem over the past week and how it all ended! So they fill him in. He offers an explanation for it all to them....that it had to happen to fulfill the Scriptures. I'm not sure they bought it.

They are about to turn in to the place they were going to stay for the night. The stranger continues to head toward Emmaus. They invite him to stay with them for dinner and the night. He accepts their invitation. It was not until they began to share their meal, to break bread that suddenly "their eyes were opened". They got it! They recognized Him. Imagine, walking and talking with a stranger, entering into their lodging, and then suddenly you realize that all the time you have been with a friend, and you never knew it!

This was Sunday. The crucifixion was Friday. Saturday was a solemn day as the heaviness of grief rolled upon them. And then Sunday and the empty tomb!

Depending on the particular Gospel you read, beginning Sunday morning Jesus appeared to his disciples a number of times: to Mary in the cemetery, (Slide #6) to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus(Slide #7), to the disciples behind locked doors, (Slide #8) and then again to them when Thomas was with them. Peter and the other disciples had been out on the water all night and had caught no fish. (Slide #9) From the shore, he advised them, to cast their nets on the other side. When they got close to shore they recognized him and later they had a BBQed fish breakfast with them. (Slide # 10) Finally they met with him on a mountainside where he gave them the great commission and then vanished. (Slide #11)

Jesus came to them quietly and unannounced on a dusty road, at a meal, in the garden, on the shore. Listen to what the great writer and theologian Frederick Buechner has to say about this. "In these quiet, common places, if we look with our hearts and listen with all of our being and our imagination, what we may see is Jesus himself, what we may hear is the first faint sound of a voice somewhere deep within us saying that there is a purpose in this life, in our lives, whether we can understand it completely or not; and that this purpose follows behind us through all our doubting and being afraid, through all our indifference and boredom, to a moment when suddenly we know for sure that everything does make sense....and there is forgiveness, and love, and mercy and compassion."

You know that there are people who see the hand of God in absolutely everything that happens and they let you know about it. If their car goes off the road, they see the hand of God there. If it does not, they see the hand of God there. If their lawn mower breaks down, it is God's will. If it does not, it is God's will.

They may be right. I don't know. I know that I am not from that school of theology. It doesn't mean I am right. But I can better relate to Mary who initially mistook Jesus for the

gardener in the cemetery. I can relate better to those two disciples walking down the road blind to the fact that Jesus was right there with them. I can relate more to Frederick Beuchner who suggests that there is a voice deep within us and sometimes we hear this voice that tells us that our lives matter. We are so quick to wave the Not Good Enough flag, The Flag of Imperfection, The flag of Unworthiness. To truly, fully embrace the truth that our lives matter, seems to be a given.....but so many of us cannot buy into that.....yes, we might say that our lives matter, but certainly not as much as this person or that person. Beuchner reminds us that every now and again that voice deep within us reminds us that there is such a thing as love, and mercy, and compassion and forgiveness and that we have the capacity to offer it, and to receive it. The voice cries out from deep within, our lives matter.

There are some who claim that in a dream or a vision, they have seen Jesus. I cannot make that claim. But I have heard and listened to that voice deep within. I believe it was Jesus, or God or the Holy Spirit. And one of the times I heard it, it simply said No. It was not audible. It was not a voice that had sound. But as clear as anything, I was being told No. It was in regard to a job I had applied for. The job looked wonderful. The interview went very well. I was confident that I would be offered the job. But a number of times prior to the interview and many times after, this No was all over me. I couldn't understand it. According to my logic and reason, it should be all Yeses. I don't know why, but for some reason I listened to that voice deep within, and I withdrew my application from the competition. The chairman of the committee tried to convince me to reconsider. He told me that the interview committee had very much enjoyed meeting me and were very pleased with the interview. I shared with him how much I enjoyed and appreciated the experience, and that I had no idea why I needed to withdraw, but I felt that God was calling me to do so. He understood.

So this is what we are left with – a dead man walking, and advising, and eating....and then ascending. What do you make of all of this? What difference does any of this make to you? How does any of this affect your life?

Amen