

THE ROAD TO EMMAUS, Pastor Phil Strong

Text: Luke 24:13-32

Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016



Growth Questions

“I had hoped _____”. Have you abandoned hope altogether or are you now simply looking for something else to which you might attach your hopes?”

“When is the last time that you lost track of Jesus in the midst of a chaotic and dramatic life-circumstance?”

“Where might you need to become more aware of Jesus’ presence with you in order to move past disappointment and toward understanding?”

Teaching Notes

Today, all around the nation, people will be gathering together around this centralizing message of the Christian faith: “**Christ is risen!**” The responses to such a declaration will be varied, but can likely be captured with one of two declarations: “**So what!**”, or, “**So... what?**”

One response is to dismiss the resurrection as an improbable historical event which has little or no relevance to our present condition. The other response is a sincere appeal for deeper understanding and truth; for an experience of resurrection for ourselves.

As we consider the biographers of Jesus, we are made aware that there were two things upon which they could agree: **first**, he was **dead**. Not metaphorically dead, not ‘figure of speech’ dead, not ‘kind of’ dead: clinically, biologically, three-days-dead. The Jewish belief was that the soul didn’t leave the body until after three days. **Second**, resurrection was the surprise twist in the plot that nobody saw coming.

In order to sit before this story today with any real hope of grasping its relevance, we must be willing to concede that...

... although not all of Jesus’ activities were “scripted”, they were “storied”.

What I mean to suggest is that although Jesus was part of a “storied” faith, his actions were not forced or prescribed so as to guarantee a particular outcome.

Jesus didn't need to be prophetic to predict the outcome that such actions and teachings would provoke. You didn't say the kind of things that Jesus said and do the kind of things that Jesus did (which subverted the Roman rule and challenged the collusion of the religious leaders) and think that you would live to tell about it.

... what we are witnessing is not some brutal display of senseless violence, but the most unreasonable act of love the world has ever seen.

It's easy to assume, at first glance, that this is a story about an unfortunate, albeit delusional peasant boy from the Galilee with a "messiah complex".

Too often, what we fail to see, is that this young Jewish boy, riding into Jerusalem amidst all of the Passover hype is God himself, all dressed up in flesh, providing us with a 3-D representation of God, with no special lenses required.

... there is something about the cross and the resurrection that usually captures our heart before it accommodates our reasoning.

Human logic and rationale cannot account for the resurrection. We can't take it and fit it neatly into one of the existing food groups. Quite frankly, no amount of proof will suffice if you don't want to believe!

This story is just what we have come to expect from Jesus: willing to leave the masses and find the disoriented few whose hearts are broken and who are **"back-peddling from hope"**. The ones whose lives had not unfolded according to the script.

We all construct our lives (formulate our stories) in such a way as to envision the best possible ending, but often that story collapses and the disillusionment is written all over our faces: I said, "I do", our spouse says, "I don't want to, anymore", our position is eliminated, our 401K tanks. *"At least you've got your health..."*, then the diagnosis comes.

"They were prevented from recognizing him..."

Here's what I love about Jesus: he never used his "Godness" to overwhelm anyone into belief. Jesus knows he can't leave us 'to ourselves', in this condition. He knows that without "revelation" (truth coming from outside of/beyond us) that we will reach all of the wrong conclusions about life, about God about ourselves and the result will be the slow-decay of our hearts.

This is the ultimate episode of **"Undercover Boss"**, right? In order to interact with them in ways that are authentic and unedited, he must not be recognized, otherwise, they may allow themselves to offer the **'expected response'** rather than the honest one.

So, for (7) miles, Jesus offers no pat answers, no sentimental clichés, no attempt to dismiss their feelings as inappropriate. He just asks reflective questions and simply listens.

“We had hoped he was the one to save Israel...”

Notice, their expectations were directly linked to how they understood their story. But, this is their own self-explanatory version of life: no surprise, no mystery, no God-interacting, only logical and rational explanations.

“Beginning with Moses and all the prophets...”

Jesus can only be known in “this” (the biblical) Story. Luke is demonstrating that the story only makes sense as it is told as the great finale to the story being told by Moses and the prophets [e.g. like knowing Martin Luther King apart from the Civil Rights Movement, or Abraham Lincoln apart from the Emancipation Proclamation]. It’s the story of how the Creator God was going about restoring the world through Israel, (dealing with all that was wrong: sin), not by eliminating their suffering, but by taking the world’s suffering upon himself--- dying for it, dying to it--- and walking out the other side of death into God’s new world; new creation.

Resurrection was part of the package deal. It was understood to be the “reversal” or the “undoing” of death: humanity’s greatest enemy. It was thought to be the great event that would signal that ***God’s new day (new creation)*** had arrived.

Easter is not simply about “happy endings” or the anticipation of a “utopian afterlife”.

It is God’s decisive “no” to sin and chaos and dysfunctionality and corruption and death--- all that stands in the way of shalom, and a decisive “yes” to forgiveness and order and meaning and beauty and life--- all that God dreams for us.

Resurrection is not simply an event to be celebrated, but a life to be lived!

“Be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the LORD, for you know that nothing you do for the LORD is useless .” [1 Cor. 15:58]

The anticipated response is that what Jesus initiated at the resurrection would continue to be implemented by his followers until it is thoroughly complete. It means that every display of justice, every demonstration of mercy, every act of compassion, every deed of love [cup of cold water, visiting the imprisoned, mentoring, backpacks of food for those in need, etc] contributes in ways that are meaningful and eternal. Our lives “count”; our choices matter to God.

“...he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened...” (v30)

Every moment of your life, God is pressing in on you... though you may not be aware. It's never a matter of proximity, but of awareness and invitation.

“Stay with us...” the sincere and fundamental posture of welcome which is all Jesus needs to hear in order to remain and makes himself known to you. Jesus gladly and patiently offers himself to us until we are finally able to recognize him.

What's missing from Christianity--- what's missing from our Easter considerations--- is the unmistakable “God-moment”.

The sudden and surprising Presence of Jesus with you which can neither be manufactured nor explained.

The liberating and life-giving encounter for which there is no other justification except, **“It was God!”**, not as some pious retort, but as a stunned exclamation.

Emmaus always happens. It's about:

- *our pursuit of life* - calling into question God's goodness and his good intentions
- *the experience of suffering and loss* - inevitable outcome of the self-directed life
- *death* - to everything we've been clinging to for dear life
- *resurrection life* - through death and out the other side

Admittedly, sometimes it's hard to reconcile all the claims about the resurrection with all the 'disorder' and 'dysfunction' we seem to still be experiencing. Certainly, the implications of this reality will be worked out over a lifetime in partial and often unsatisfactory ways (e.g. *taste, down payment, distorted image through a poorly manufactured glass*), but in ways that prove to be sign-posts for the way forward.

The resurrection calls us to...

... live in the present with a sense of awareness and mission--- with our eyes wide open to all of the ruin and devastation we face daily, yet still remain hopeful.

... find a new way forward and experience the renewed possibilities for your life made available only in and through the resurrected Jesus.

... know that our depression and our infidelity and our anger and our greed and our insecurities will never preclude us from being part of his Story. He continues to re-engage us in the Story of our own restoration (transformation) so he can tell it in and through us. Not simply hoping things will get better, but actually helping to make things better.