

April 28, 2019

“One Day: Seeing With the Eyes of the Heart”

Luke 24:13-35

For those keeping track, this is still that same One Day we celebrated last Sunday. In Luke’s Gospel, nobody has seen Jesus yet; they just know the tomb is empty. But that’s about to change. We don’t know how far they were into their 7-mile journey home to Emmaus when Jesus joins them. We don’t know how long Jesus’ teaching would have lasted, but if “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27) then they were walking together on that dusty path for quite some time. And yet, “Their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.” (Luke 24:16)

Why didn’t they know it was Jesus? Did He have a different appearance? [In John’s Gospel it seems Mary Magdalene doesn’t recognize Jesus right away either.] Was their grief dulling their senses? Are they not paying attention? Was a resurrected Jesus (or a suffering Messiah) so off the radar that they just couldn’t see Him? We really can’t blame them for being a little fuzzy about all this, can we?

We do know that well before Jesus died they were having trouble understanding the larger story of scripture, just like so many other teachers of the law and prophets. We also know that the disciples themselves couldn’t grasp what Jesus kept saying about His impending suffering. N. T. Wright put their struggle with scripture like this: “They, like everybody else in Israel, had been reading the Bible through the wrong end of the telescope.” (N.T. Wright in *Luke for Everyone*)

Maybe Wright means they were just reading the scriptures for information, or to win their arguments, or to show off how much they knew, or as a proof-texting document. I think what he’s mostly getting at is that many, if not most, Jewish leaders had DISCONNECTED the study of scripture from their hearts and everyday lives, and passed on a similar problem to others.

Are we guilty of something similar, even though we have the fuller and much-more-complete story of God’s redeeming work? Do we mostly live in our heads when it comes to scripture? Do we treat God’s Word like a subject in school or an interesting program on the History Channel? Are we seeking to integrate all of the Bible into all of our lives? If so, how? Do we really want to see Jesus when we open the pages of scripture?

Wright reminds us that “Luke emphasizes what the church all too easily forgets: that the careful study of the Bible is meant to bring together head and heart, understanding and excited application.” (N.T. Wright in *Luke for Everyone*) Jesus never wanted His teachings to be published in a Study Bible without the words being worked into our actual lives!

But even after Jesus gives the greatest Bible study ever, they still don't SEE it's Him. SO . . . He continues the Sunday School lesson, but uses less explanation and more demonstration. Jesus makes this an experiential learning moment. He breaks bread with them. And suddenly, they see Jesus. This is what we often refer to as an "AHA moment."

The Bible is full of experiential moments when God communicates to all five senses. The sacraments are just one example of this. We feel/touch, see, hear the waters of baptism, and add taste and smell to the list as we celebrate communion.

Because of this passage, and many others from the Old and New Testament, our particular branch on The Church's much larger family tree places a strong emphasis on both Word and Sacrament. Preaching and teaching matter to be sure, but we also believe the celebration of our two sacraments (Communion and Baptism are considered a special means of grace) communicates truths which can penetrate our hearts and help us experience God's presence and grace in palpable ways.

The official title of a pastor in the Presbyterian Church is Minister of Word and Sacrament. I would rather you call me Tom. And I tell people I'm a pastor when they ask me what I do or what brought our family to the Grand Valley. But I do like knowing I was ordained to love and care for the Word of God **and** administer the Sacraments with love and care ("rightly administered" is the old language).

N.T. Wright puts it better than I can. "Scripture and sacrament, word and meal, are joined tightly together, here as elsewhere. Take scripture away, and the sacrament becomes a piece of magic. Take the sacrament away, and scripture becomes an intellectual or emotional exercise, detached from real life." (N.T. Wright in *Luke for Everyone*)

Jesus' use of Word **and** Sacrament help these two SEE Jesus. "Then their eyes were opened; and they recognized Him . . . They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road? " " (Luke 24:31-32) Notice they did not say, "Wow, He was answering all my questions and filling in the gaps of my previous education." They talk about something that was happening in their hearts.

What does Jesus help them SEE (that is help them know in a way that penetrates their hearts and lives) that helps them SEE Jesus? "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer . . . ?" (Luke 24:26) This is the only part of His teaching Luke mentions. Is it possible they started to understand the reality that Messiah and suffering are inseparable?

What we see in the scriptures, and what Jesus was helping them to see on the road, is a God who doesn't take away all suffering, but comes to be with us in the midst of it, and draw us closer to Himself as He leads us through it. Furthermore, what we see in scripture is a God who takes suffering upon Himself.

And what about that sacramental moment when Jesus broke bread with them and their eyes were opened? When we celebrate communion we hear words that are synonymous with suffering: "blood shed/poured out, and body broken." Both scripture and sacrament make it clear: suffering is a part of who Jesus is and what Jesus does. [

I'm not saying Jesus is in the business of giving cancer and causing car accidents on I-70 or blowing up buildings in Sri Lanka. I'm talking about suffering out of love for God and others; entering into the suffering of others. If we can't/won't see suffering (especially the suffering of others), maybe we can't/won't see much of Jesus at work.

Maybe that's why we often feel like we're not seeing Jesus clearly. We do all we can to avert our eyes from suffering. We avoid it like the plague. We deny its existence. We surround ourselves with as many comforts as possible to create the illusion that there is such a thing as a (mostly) suffering-free life.

Let's go back to last Sunday and this great question the women are asked at the Empty Tomb: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5) I was pretty clear we discover dead ends and disappointing results when we try to squeeze life out of people and things that can never satisfy our restless hearts. But most people pursue just about everything anyway and have to find out for themselves. The only thing I haven't seen people pursue for life is suffering.

This morning I want to clarify that suffering, though it seems like the dead end of all dead ends, may actually be where life and Jesus are found most often. **Suffering, especially the suffering of others and the suffering of God, is not something to run from.** When it comes to suffering, we tend to avoid what looks and feels dead when, in fact, it oozes with life!

That quote from N.T Wright earlier continues after he says "the people had been reading the Bible through the wrong end of the telescope. They had been seeing it as the long story of how God would redeem Israel *from* suffering, but it was instead the story of how God would redeem Israel *through* suffering." (N.T. Wright in *Luke for Everyone*)

If I try to over explain this, or if we over think it, we'll miss what's right in front of us; a truth we've been walking with for many years and endless miles on the road of life. When we don't run from but run towards the suffering of others; when we embrace a sacrificial life lived on behalf of others who struggle and in relationship with those who suffer; when we're honest about

our own suffering and struggles; that is often when Jesus becomes most alive in us and around us. It's often where we see/feel/know Jesus most clearly. **Where we see with the eyes of our hearts.**

Let me make it clear: I'm not talking about glorifying suffering or becoming a spiritual masochist or thinking God causes all suffering. I'm talking about keeping our eyes and hands open toward those who struggle and suffer, believing that Jesus is close to them. I'm talking about what Robert Lewis declares in Men's Fraternity on Thursday mornings: **we must die to live.** I'm talking about moving toward hard places and hard realities in the lives of others so as not to miss out on being near Jesus.

You have an opportunity to test this out by participating in **Sharefest**. I cannot promise you that the person you serve will be a chronic sufferer. But I can almost guarantee they will be someone who struggles more than you do and has less than you do. By signing up to serve someone and get to know their story may be one of the best ways for you to see Jesus alive and at work. And if it isn't Sharefest, find something or someone else to serve. Get more connected to International Justice Mission and get prayer updates. Look into fostering or helping support foster families. Go on a mission trip to Los Angeles with our students, or to Uganda with me. Or something/someone else . . .

Entering hard places, giving of ourselves sacrificially, moving toward injustice, embracing difficulty, and acknowledging brokenness . . . fills us with life! What I know is that God longs for that One Day when more and more of His sons and daughters live in His clear and loving presence, and are willing to enter the broken places here on earth where He is already present and at work and waiting for us to join Him.

And, trust me on this one too: God also promises that suffering will One Day be swallowed up by life itself. One Day, further down the road and because of the Resurrected Jesus, there will be no more suffering, no more brokenness.