

Building Blocks of Faith: Recognizing Jesus – Pastor Donna Doult Luke 24:13–35

Today's scripture is one of my favorites because it covers two different aspects of Christian life: First, walking with Jesus; second breaking bread together. This entire scripture is fraught with meaning for us to use in our own life applications, especially now in these most difficult times that we are living through.

So here we go. Let's walk along to Emmaus.

We've got two post-resurrection disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Those two people who walked the road to Emmaus on the first Easter knew Jesus by sight. ¹Scholars now say they may have been a married couple, and Cleopas is a name so close to another Gospel character's that we may wonder if the unnamed person was the "wife of Clopas" whom John's Gospel (19:25) places at the foot of the cross.

Even on foot, this walk is a doable journey for most in those days. It was a distance of about seven miles and probably took about 2-1/2 hours to cover at a casual pace. The walkers were in no hurry. They were disappointed and distressed. They had based their hopes for the future on this man called Jesus. But he was crucified and now he's disappeared!

They were at their wit's end. They were at a loss as to what to do now. Like us who thought we once knew that our life was about as good as can be, and is now disrupted; their life is also disrupted. It makes me think of that wonderful line, ²"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but

¹ Brooks, Kyle E.. A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series, Volume 2 (p. 33). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

² United Methodist Publishing House. *United Methodist Hymnal*. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN.

wholly lean on Jesus' name." They had placed all their hope on Jesus and now, to the best of their knowledge, he was gone.

So the story goes, the two on the road to Emmaus encountered a man who came along side. Noticing their earnest and animated conversation he asked them what they were discussing.

Now I have to point out here that these were disciples who knew Jesus, but they couldn't see he was right there with them. They didn't recognize his voice. They didn't recognize Jesus. But they're shocked to realize this stranger had not heard about Jesus. They ask, *"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"* They go on to tell him all they knew about the crucifixion and the mystery of the missing body.

Jesus himself is just as surprised at their lack of understanding.²⁵⁻²⁷
"³Then he said to them, "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him."

That's so powerful. Can you imagine what it would have been like to walk with Jesus for almost three hours listening to all of this? But the sad thing is, they didn't know what a privilege was bestowed on them because that did NOT recognize Jesus.

This encounter reminds me so much of that poem or prayer that I'm sure many of you know, the "Footprints in the Sand." It goes like this:

³ The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

⁴*One night I had a dream...*

*I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and
Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two
sets of footprints in the sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the
Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at
the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of
my life, There was only one set of footprints.*

*I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in
my life. This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it.
“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
You would walk with me all the way;
But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life,
There is only one set of footprints.
I don’t understand why in times when I needed you the most, you
should leave me.*

*The Lord replied, “My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would
never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When
you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you.*

This was the “footprints in the sand” moment for these two disciples. In their distress over the crucifixion and the disappearance of the beloved body, they did not know or understand that Jesus was walking right alongside of them. They did NOT recognize Jesus.

I want you to think about that...let that soak in for a minute. We need to stop right here... this day... and think about all the things that have taken place. Like these disciples, we are also living in a time of high anxiety, uncertainty, despair, and loneliness. Would we recognize Jesus even if we saw him walking along side of us?

⁴ <https://www.footprints-in-the-sand.com/index.php?page=Poem/Poem.php>

Have we failed to look at our own “footprints in the sand?”

When have you failed to see Jesus in your life? When have you let the world, social media, and your fears blind you to Jesus’ love for you? Everything else in this world is screaming and shouting for our attention, playing on our fears and anxious hearts. But know this...Jesus doesn’t need to shout. He can come to you in a whisper.

Our story continues on when the disciples and Jesus reach their destination, and Jesus leaves them free to continue on without him. Jesus gives them the choice to invite him along or leave him behind. That’s just how he is.

⁵“His love is such that we are always free to turn our backs upon him, close the door of our hearts against him, bolt our minds shut in fear of what inviting him in might involve.” He gives his journeying companions the opportunity to ask him to continue on with them.

And they do. They make the correct decision, and invite him along for dinner. When he was at the table with them, like many other times when Jesus uses bread to open hearts and minds, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. *“Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”* (Luke 24:30–31. Finally, FINALLY, they recognized Jesus. But just when they do....poof....he’s gone!

It happened in the breaking of the bread, the first time that people who knew Jesus made the connection to him through the bread that represented his body. Future generations would go on to recognize him, to perceive his presence, each time the bread was broken. Christ’s presence became apparent and took away all their worries.

⁵Jarvis, Cynthia A. Pater, Shannon Michael. *Feasting on the Word – Year A*, Volume 2. Bartlett, David L., et al., editors. Louisville, Kentucky. 2010. Print.

I know we haven't had the opportunity to experience Communion, the breaking of the bread together, in a long time, but sometimes we have to experience something anew to remember what we were doing in the first place. A whole loaf feeds no one. Bread is meant to be broken and shared with one another. Not in solitude. Soon my friends...soon. Hopefully, we can gather together and break bread with one another.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we sometimes like to tell the story of how disappointing the world is, how things aren't fair or didn't turn out the way we planned. On the road, Jesus patiently explained it all to them, his place in history and all the teachings that seemed so confusing at the time. When they talked about it later, they realized their hearts were burning all along. They saw the light!

Scripture says,³² *Back and forth the two of them talked. How could they have missed this? "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"* they asked one another.

Verses 33-34 tell us, *"They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up!"*

An eloquent writer describes this scene so beautifully. Rev. Shannon Michael Pater says,⁶ "Their burning hearts illumine their blind eyes and quicken their weary souls for a seven-mile nighttime run in the moonlight of Easter. Their sacred city is made holy again, and their pilgrimage of faith has just begun."

We have so much to take away from this lesson:

- Christ is with us always, even when we don't know it.

⁶ Pater, Shannon Michael. *Feasting on the Word – Year A*, Volume 2. Bartlett, David L., et al., editors. Louisville, Kentucky. 2010. Print.

- Christ is with us even when we don't recognize him.
- Christ is with us when we don't acknowledge him.
- Christ is with us when we break bread together as a congregation.

But the bottom-line, good news is this: death could not take away our Jesus, and resurrection brought us Christ, who is with us in every time, every situation, and every place.

Amen.

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV) Psalm 116 (p. 837)

The Walk to Emmaus

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.[b] 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” 19 He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth,[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” 25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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