

“But we had hoped...”

Luke 24:13-35

Intro

As Jennifer said last week, “God meets us where we are at.” God met the disciples in the upper room, hiding behind locked doors because they feared they would be rounded up and punished as well. Jesus brings peace to their troubled hearts.

Today, we see two disciples, deep in discussion or argument, and Jesus meets them where they are at by explaining the things they weren’t understanding, things that were causing them to abandon the hope they had in him initially. They needed a new understanding to know that this was not the end... but only the beginning.

When you’ve gone all in, you have everything to lose

It’s can be hard for us to appreciate the kinds of things going through these two disciple’s minds as they are walking back home. (I say ‘home’ because, when they get to Emmaus, they urge Jesus, “Stay with us,” suggesting they are in one of their homes).

Reading this passage, it can feel so casual- until we remember what’s at stake here.

The most powerful Judean leaders made it clear over the last three years that they think Jesus is a fraud, a heretic and a trouble-maker. And now they have succeeded in getting him crucified. So, besides having their hopes dashed, these two disciples may have had some conversation about their own safety. Maybe they left to put some distance between themselves and Jerusalem, since they had a home to go to that wasn’t too far to reach.

These two disciples- same as the 11 and many others- had gambled on this man. Now their honor was at stake. If people decided that they were at risk if they were seen supporting the followers of Jesus in any way, they are not going to buy from them, they are not going to acknowledge them and they are not going to have them over for a Shabbat dinner.

In short, it could be their ruin.

So, this is not a pleasant walk of two friends sharing thoughts and ideas. It’s sharing everything from, “What are we going to if....?”, to “Were we completely deluded? How could it have ended this way?”

Verse 14 says that they were “...talking with each other about all these things that had happened...,” while the next verse says, “they were talking and discussing...”. The first word “talking” in the Greek means exactly that. But the word “discussing” means to dispute, question, and reason with. I can imagine that, as they walked along, they might alternate between defending Jesus and doubting the things he said and did. Maybe switching sides- when Cleopas was throwing doubt on everything then his friend was vigorously defending Jesus, and they might take opposite sides on some other issue.

When you’ve gone all in, you have everything to lose.

The scandal of the cross

When Jesus joined the two on the road and listened to their explanation of what they were talking, discussing and arguing about, the disciples conclude with, “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Then they mention the “astounding” report of the women about an empty tomb. The empty tomb meant nothing to them. When the “chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him”, that was the end of their hope.

Jesus says to them, ““Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”

The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:23, “...we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Judeans and foolishness to gentiles...”.

The word "stumbling-block" in Greek is σκάνδαλον skandalon- from which we get our word, “scandalous.” A stumbling block is anything that gives offence.

Why is the cross- that is, the idea that the long-awaited Messiah would be crucified- a “stumbling block”, and offense?

The people of Israel had for centuries been looking for a regal and victorious Messiah. They expected the Messiah to be a military figure who would fight the Romans and drive them out. Some Israelites were expecting a prophet like Moses. The Judeans wanted to return to the glory

days under their greatest ruler, King David. The notion of a suffering and humiliated Messiah, crucified by their Gentile oppressors was detestable and unacceptable.

They regarded Jesus as someone given over to die by God for his erroneous teachings, being justly put to death; an object of the curse of the Almighty. As we read in Isaiah 53:4, "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God."

But, as Paul said in Romans 9:33,

"See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever trusts in him will not be put to shame."

The scandal of the cross.

And this is the world that the disciples on the road to Emmaus- and all the other disciples- grew up in. This mindset was in the very air they breathed and the water they drank. The Messiah will restore Israel to her former glory. They missed "all that the prophets had declared", beginning with Moses. As did the Pharisees.

However, while Jesus lived and taught and ministered, people were drawn to him. They saw in him what their hearts ached for, what their thirsty souls longed for. The cross was the plot-twist nobody was prepared for.

Restorer of Hope

Verse 16 says, "but their eyes were kept from recognizing him." We could speculate that this was due to divine intervention, the Spirit of God literally keeping them from recognizing Jesus. We could also imagine that, having seen Jesus clearly die and be buried, and the reports of the empty tomb didn't suggest resurrection to them, then there was no possibility that this person joining them on the road was Jesus. The mind simply wouldn't allow such an impossible thought.

Regardless of the reason that they don't recognize him, I think it is an important part of the message of this passage.

They- and the other disciples- did not recognize Jesus for the Messiah he was while he was alive. That is, the scripturally prophesied Messiah who would suffer and die in exactly the way he did. Now that he is risen, they need to have the correct picture of God's Chosen One or they will go right back to expecting to fight the Romans with their own army and miss the path Jesus has illustrated by his life and death.

It is important that they not recognize him yet. If they had, they probably would have wanted to take him back to Jerusalem to the other disciples and start talking strategy. Think of it! “When we show the resurrected Jesus to all of Jerusalem, well, everybody will rally to him and then we’ll have no trouble raising an army! Even the pharisees will have to admit they were wrong and get on board! And when anyone gets hurt in the battle, Jesus will just heal them!”

I may be stretching it a bit here, but you get what I am saying. The followers of Jesus didn’t expect him to be delivered to the power of Gentiles and crucified, so they have not understood yet what the work and ministry of a disciple is supposed to be after Jesus ascends to glory. Their ministry will be modeled on his sacrifice.

Because this is the way for all who will follow: not fighting but serving, not separating but including, not judging but healing, and not seeking to save your life but to lose it for his sake. No armies, no battles, no defeating the Romans. Jesus’ revolution is a revolution of the heart, and the enemies are not people, the enemies are ignorance, poverty, disenfranchisement, exclusion and oppression.

Conclusion:

The story of the Road to Emmaus isn’t just a homely story of Jesus caring for a couple of disciples who had lost hope and faith in him. It is a pivotal story of how none of the disciples had understood what his life and death meant. We can’t blame them for anticipating a Messiah who would rule Israel and restore her fortunes and glory, destroying the Roman oppressors. They were steeped in this belief.

And so here, on this road, even before Jesus appears to the disciples in the locked room, he opens the eyes of two disciples to what the scriptures had been saying all along, that the Messiah had to suffer “these things and then enter into his glory.” And so must we.