

Luke 24:13-35

¹³⁻¹⁶ That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ He asked, “What’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

¹⁹⁻²⁴ He said, “What has happened?”

They said, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn’t see Jesus.”

²⁵⁻²⁷ Then 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.

²⁸⁻³¹ They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: “Stay and have supper with us. It’s nearly evening; the day is done.” So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

³² Back and forth they talked. “Didn’t we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?”

³³⁻³⁴ 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—Simon saw him!”

³⁵ Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

He Lives As Our Savior

How many baby boomers do I have here? How many Generation Xs? Generation Ys? Millennials? How many people have no idea what I’m talking about? How many people think that I have no idea what I’m talking about? Sociologists have long been working to describe traits of different generations of people – different things that motivate them and interest them, different values, and these differences have a lot to do with shared experiences like wars or economic depressions or the advent of new technologies (how many parents here lament the fact

that their millennial children spend so much time on their cell phones or online games?) Sociologists are careful to point out that individuals don't fit neatly into these categories; you'll always find people whose values and interests differ from most of their peers, but recognizing the differences between these generations can be useful in helping us understand the tension that we may experience with people of a different generation.

And one thing that generational studies show is a lack of social progress. We certainly enjoy technological progress and medical progress, perhaps even economic progress. But generally speaking the same social illnesses exist from generation to generation. People continue to steal from one another. People continue to hurt one another, and people continue to hurt themselves, which from a social point of view is hurting the community as it costs the community resources to address such issues; it's estimated that the combined economic cost of alcohol abuse and the opioid epidemic in the United States is around \$500 billion each year. Crime has a much higher cost in societal terms. One study found that the societal cost of incarceration was in excess of a trillion dollars each year. And of course the United States is not the only country with societal issues; every nation has them, and every nation *has* had them from generation to generation. In terms of social unrest I don't see the world as becoming any better or worse than it has been since the beginning of human history, and it matters not if you're a baby boomer or generation x or not even from the United States. The world is a broken place and looks like it will continue to be broken for the foreseeable future.

We're not all thieves and warmongers and substance abusers, and as law-abiding individuals living in a broken world we try to make our *own* world a better place. We have locks on our doors at home, and we use them to protect our homes and families. We strive to live in safe neighborhoods and send our children to safe schools. But I doubt there's anyone here who hasn't been the victim of some crime, who hasn't had something stolen from them, even though you lock the door, so in the back of your mind there's always that dread. And as many policies are put into effect to ensure the safety of our schools, there is still the nagging worry in the back of our minds that some nut with an automatic weapon is going to target the school that your children attend. And despite your efforts to play by the rules and commit no crime you may still be concerned that you will be targeted by others because of the color of your skin or the language you speak or your country of origin or your place of worship. We try to make our world a better place, but all of us at some level recognize that our world can only be so good, that a perfect world is unattainable and the best we can do is control for some of the risks.

So are we even capable of imagining a perfect world? Can you imagine a world where you don't have locks because nobody would ever think about taking what belongs to you? Can you imagine a world where everyone treats everyone fairly and no police force is necessary because there are no threats to public peace and safety? It's hard to imagine that because we are so used to living in fear. We may not even be conscious of locking our doors behind us, but we do it nonetheless. We may not consciously avoid going for an early morning jog in a hoodie in an affluent neighborhood, but we avoid it nonetheless.

Which brings me to our scripture passage today, about Cleopas and his friend are no different from us. They have come to expect a less-than-perfect world. They are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, sad because Jesus, someone who they had pinned man of their hopes on, had been

crucified, and despite the talk of a missing body and possible resurrection the evidence just didn't convince them. But even if the evidence *did* point to the fact that Jesus was somehow alive, would it matter anymore? You see, Cleopas and his friend had hoped that Jesus would be the one to "deliver Israel." They hoped that Jesus would cast out the Roman overlords and the corrupt priesthood that was collaborating with the Romans to deprive the Jews of a decent life, where they could enjoy the fruits of their labors without being taxed to death, where they would not be treated as second-class citizens and forced into labor for the foreign army that occupied their land. That's what Cleopas and his friend were hoping for, and to be honest, a Resurrected Jesus was not likely to make that happen. A Warrior Jesus who could inspire an armed uprising against Rome and the priestly aristocracy could have made that happen, but Jesus had shown his true colors, surrendering without a fight only to be humiliated and executed. Why should a resurrected Jesus be any different from the non-violent Jesus who went to the cross? But of course a Warrior Jesus would not have been an end to all their troubles. Yes life might have been better for the Jews if the Romans were driven out of their country and the corruption in the Temple had ended, but how much better would the new priesthood be? And would everyone suddenly live in harmony with one another? Would all robbery and greed and infidelity and prejudice suddenly cease? No, a Warrior Jesus, a Son-of-David Jesus would not make the world a perfect place any more than King David made Israel a perfect place; David himself was a murderer and an adulterer.

I think this explains why Jesus had to have a little talk with Cleopas and his friend and why it was not until *after* he had spent hours explaining things to these guys that they were able to recognize Jesus *for who he truly is*. Cleopas and his friend were like many of us, having limited hopes and limited expectations. Jesus needed to explain to these guys that the Messiah was not interested in some limited form of salvation; the Messiah was interested in world salvation, and salvation from more than a limited easy-to-define enemy like the Roman Empire. The Messiah was interested in world transformation, in ridding the planet of the greatest enemy of all, the enemy that robs all of us of peace and joy and prosperity, and that enemy is sin in every form that it presents itself. And sin is not just an outside problem; it is an *inside* problem as well. Jesus needed to make it clear to Cleopas and his companion that the Messiah is out to destroy evil, and you can't do that with swords and bow and arrows; you do it with love, and it involves a transformation of the heart of every human being.

And this became clear to Cleopas and his friend after a long walk and talk with the resurrected Christ. They would not have recognized him had they not understood what he was telling them. Because they understood his message they were able to recognize that it was Jesus who was speaking to them.

My question to you this morning is this: *Have you met this Risen Christ and recognized him as the Savior of the world?* You don't have to limit your expectations of this world. Christ wants you to see the big picture, to see that all creation will be perfected because evil has been defeated; that's what the Resurrection means. The Resurrection empowers us to dream. The Resurrection empowers us to hope. The Resurrection empowers us to have faith in God's redemptive work in this world. Have you met this Risen Christ who instills us with such hope and such faith?

I'm inviting you to share your testimonies over the coming weeks of *how* you have met the Risen Christ. Today I'll briefly share my own experience. I was a cynical baby boomer. Cynical because, even though I grew up in an "upper" middle class family I quickly learned that the world, and even my own nation, was not such a perfect place. I wanted to believe that our nation was good and that good always prevailed, but in 1975, when I was 15 years old, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese army and American soldiers were forced to flee the country. I believed that the President of the United States was the most admirable, honest person in the country, but about a year earlier, when I was 14, President Richard Nixon resigned after it had become pretty clear that he had lied to the nation. I believed that our family was a haven of love and security, but throughout my teen years my parents' marriage was rapidly falling apart, and when I was 18 they announced that they were getting a divorce. By that time I was pretty jaded, pretty cynical. I had limited expectations of what the world could be. But when I met people of faith I saw something positive working in them. I saw in them a faith that this world could be a perfect place, and I saw that faith play out in the way they treated me and others. I could lash out and still they would love me and accept me. When I asked what enabled them to be so loving they said it was not them so much as it was Christ within them. I somehow was able to experience the infinite love of an infinite God and come to believe that God *could* change the world, and I understood how Jesus lived the change that he believed in. And when the powers of evil crucified him, I could see that Jesus *had* to rise from the grave because those powers of evil could not prevail. This didn't all occur to me at once, but over time I came to believe in Jesus as Savior not just of my soul but of this world.

Next week we'll consider Jesus as HEALER of the world just as he is healer of our own souls. In two weeks we'll consider Jesus as LORD of our lives and of all creation. And I pray that you would reflect on your experience of the Risen Christ. How did you meet him initially? And how is your relationship with him going? Perhaps you can share in what way you've experienced his healing, or in what way he acts as Lord in your life. Or you can share about how and why you came to believe in him as Savior of the world. You can also share about where in the process you are. Maybe you're not seeing him as all of the above, and you're welcome to share that, because I'm sure that your sharing will be a blessing to the church. Wherever you are in your faith journey, may the Risen Christ continue to speak to you, to minister to you, and to draw you ever closer in his loving embrace. Amen.