

Sermon: “Walking to Emmaus”**Scripture: Luke 24:13-35****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: April 7, 2024**

We are in the Easter season of resurrection and since we've walked our way to the empty tomb we realize that in all our walking and journeying up to this point we've not reached a destination but a starting point. It's what the disciples on the Road to Emmaus experienced dramatically, that the Road to Emmaus, which led away from the epicenter of Jesus' ministry, passion and resurrection, turned them right back around for a new beginning. The resurrection was not an ending of the story but a beginning and that's just the first surprising thing about the resurrection. There are at least 3 other surprising things about the resurrection that the road to Emmaus revealed – first, that it was more about this world than a nether-afterworld, secondly, that the resurrected Christ was more unfamiliar than familiar, and third it was for everyone more unbelievable than believable.

So first of all, whatever the resurrection was - and there was not a clearly defined or delineated sense of that even among those who encountered Jesus - but whatever it was, it was more about this world than about the next world. Jesus didn't float up to the disciples on the road to Emmaus as a specter and say “guess what? I've saved your souls from Hell and now you're going to heaven!” Isn't that interesting and worth noting that in none of the resurrection appearances does Jesus make any mention of heaven and hell, that which fundamentalist Christianity has made it ALL about? Nowhere does the resurrected Christ say that he's saved our souls and that that was the whole point. In fact the Gospel writers go out of their way to be really really clear that 1. Jesus in his resurrected self is a

physical this-worldly presence – here touch my wounds, let me have some fish to eat, I'll break this bread with you, breathe peace on you – and 2. that he's got business for them to do in there here and now, he's got work to continue: "get back to Jerusalem, get back to Galilee, and share with people the good news of God's love for this world!"

Jesus' resurrection is bodily with wounds and all, it's historical, it's political, it's not actually otherworldly. I mean for sure there are implications there but everything in the resurrection accounts suggest that it's this world that the resurrected Christ and God thereby cares about, the healing of it, the care for it, the transformation of it to come through God's love. The point is not about the afterlife, the point is the present-life of the world that God so loves. That Jesus conquered death means that we no longer need to be determined by fear and death but are freed for love no matter how far that love takes us! The greatest weapon that the empire, the powers that be, have against us is to take away our freedom and our lives themselves and that power is taken away from the powers, that's some of the political implication of the resurrection, the powers are defanged by Jesus and now we can proclaim that our freedom comes from someplace deeper and our life is secured in God. It means we can be radically committed to God's purposes and God's vision for this world and no longer need to be dictated by the limitations and injustices and violence of this world. This world. This world.

The second surprising thing that's worth noting is this - that whatever the resurrection was, the Risen Christ was not familiar to even his closest friends. He was a stranger. The Gospel writers go out of their way here also to make it clear that Jesus did not come back as the disciple's familiar friend, teacher, Lord but as a mystery, a stranger. There's an important

difference here to note between the disciples welcoming Jesus back into their clan and their old reality and what actually happened which was Jesus the resurrected Christ, welcomed them into his world and his reality. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had this experience in a dramatic way at the table. They thought they were the hosts welcoming Jesus in for the night and offering him a meal until in an epiphany moment they realized that “no, they weren’t the hosts, the stranger, the guest was the host and they were the guests sitting at table with him!” He broke the bread for them and opened their hearts and their eyes to this invitation to a new reality.

This is important for what follows because as the disciples then take up the task of sharing the good news and inviting people into the reality of the resurrected Christ, they find that they are guests themselves in this economy, this household of God, rather than the owners of it. They are not people on the inside welcoming those on the outside. They are guests themselves welcomed by the resurrected Christ. They belong because Christ welcomed them and they welcome others because that’s what the host expects of them, not due to any privilege of place for themselves. Most of what we have is gift to us, over very lives themselves, and it is incumbent upon us to share as gift the gift given unto us.

And finally, it’s worth noting that whatever the resurrection was it was not a believable thing that happened, it was un-believable. If you wonder if the resurrection is true, if it really happened, then guess what? You are one among so many. It’s not like even those to whom Jesus appeared directly and immediately in bodily form 2000 years ago were like – “oh, I believe in the resurrection of Jesus” rather they themselves were baffled, bewildered, stupefied, dumbfounded, confused, doubtful, suspicious... saying “what the

HECK is going on! I can't believe my eyes!" It's not like it was 2000 years ago before the enlightenment and the scientific method and so people were like "oh yeah, there's Jesus, he was dead and now he's resurrected. Yep, that's reasonable." It wasn't reasonable or believable AT ALL and most reasonable people didn't believe it at all and even those who encountered him directly really struggled with how to even talk about it! And out of that struggle came a ton of ways to talk and think about it – why he died, how he came back, what that meant for humanity, was he human, was he divine, what did it say about God, what did it say about us, what does the past mean and the present and especially the future now and so on and so forth. And if any Christian tells you there are single clear answers to all that, **DO NOT BELIEVE THEM!**

So don't think if you feel somewhat skeptical of the resurrection claim that you are unique in that. And don't think that because you believe in science that it disqualifies you from believing in the resurrection. They are not mutually exclusive and there's nothing now known by the scientific mind that wasn't known then by the premodern mind which proves the truth of the resurrection any more or any less. And please don't think that you among all others shouldn't belong to the church or consider yourself a Christian because you're not sure what you believe about the resurrection. You know how many people I talk to who have questions about that? You know how many people across the world and across the ages have had questions about that? Do you know how many of the people who had a direct physical, material encounter with the resurrected Christ had questions about that?

Believing in the resurrection is a matter of faith, which doesn't mean you can't believe in science or must shirk your intellectual integrity to

believe it. I don't know, maybe it just means that you make room in your intellect for the fact that you don't know everything. I'm just saying. Science doesn't know everything. And there is truth here that's deep and abiding and transformative. Like, that the resurrection proclaims that the deepest thing in this world is the love of the One Who Created It. And the resurrection proclaims that there is a kingdom of life that runs a truer, deeper, more powerful course than the kingdoms we see around us. And the resurrection proclaims that we are not alone and that we are called to give of ourselves because our lives are a gift given to us by the Divine. And the resurrection proclaims that the end of what we see and what we know is no ending at all but a beginning.

These are some of the truths that the resurrection reveals. Don't allow the irrationality of the resurrection to dissuade you from the truth of it all for there is more than what we can rationally grasp as human beings. It's all mostly mystery... but a mystery that asks and expects something of us. Could it be that our agnosticism, our claiming not to know what we believe, our skepticism is a protective response to keep us from having to face the demand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes our lives? I'm just wondering out loud here. Wondering for myself. Wondering for you.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus had some remarkable encounter with a living reality of the crucified Christ that was a revelation, a communication from God Godself. It wasn't an *idea* to decide whether they believed or not it was a life-changing encounter that determined the shape of their lives and the world from then on.

May we be open to the real presence of the risen Christ even now with an openness of mind and heart to see what that presence requires of

us in our lives. But I should probably be careful what I am asking on your behalf.... amen.