

THE ROAD AND THE TABLE: Luke 24:11-35

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This sermon is about another of Jesus' Resurrection Appearances. In it we are looking for the impact those appearances made in the lives of Jesus' followers. What do we learn from their interaction with the Risen Christ?

Now, I have never been a lover of hiking. When I went to college for 5 years (yes, the 4 years of college took me 5 years) in the very steep and rugged mountains of northeast India, I did all the walking I care to do for my whole life ...and then some! Why can't all the unwanted exercise I did then balance out the food I eat now?

I mention this because when I think of the Resurrection Appearance story of the 'Walk to Emmaus,' all I can think about is 7 miles of mountain walking! That stresses me out! I would have tried to distract myself by talking the whole way – about anything! The two men on the Road to Emmaus had far better reasons to talk. Things that had seemed so good when Jesus entered Jerusalem, suddenly and disastrously degraded into arrest, imprisonment, midnight trial, sentencing, crucifixion, and burial. Their hope-expanding movement had ended in death. They had followed and placed their hope in a man who had just been killed as an enemy of the state. They were afraid, bruised in soul and spirit, and confused. How could all of this have come to pass? To top it all off, some of the women were telling of angels saying Jesus was alive. So, they left Jerusalem and started the long walk home to take up their old lives again.

Jesus appears and walks with them, but they do not recognize him. Hearing their despair and confusion, Jesus confronts them and asks them why they do not understand? This is their 'come-to-Jesus' moment. Jesus explains everything to them. I figure that 7 mile walk in the hills of Judea would take at least 2 hours. Since Jesus had two hours to explain, I figure I should get that long, too! Get comfortable!

When they get to Emmaus, the walkers invite the unrecognized-Jesus into their home. He sits at table with them, taking the role of host. When he lifts and breaks the bread, they recognize him. They had thought they were on the road home to adjust to defeat. They had thought they were going to resume their lives and hope the authorities did not come after them as well. But, they learned they were on that road to hear the explanation that changed their lives and made them Resurrection People.

Some months ago I went to visit Evelyn in the hospital intensive care. The nurses told me she was in Room 9 and that I could go in. Stepping past the curtain, I found a lady with a terribly red and painful-looking leg. I open my big mouth and said, "You're not Evelyn! You have a very impressive looking leg!" She told me that her leg was severely inflamed and was about to be amputated. I asked her if she would like prayer. She said, "Yes, but who are you?" I apologized and told her I was Hmingi Browne, Associate Pastor for Congregational Care at Church of the Palms. She lit up with a smile and told

me her sister-in-law is a member of COP and she really would like prayer. I prayed for her and for the doctors and all who would be taking care of her and her leg. She thanked me. I went back to the nurse and said, "I thank God for nurses who goof in giving WRONG information. Sometimes that's just what God wants!" The nurse then sent me to Room 11 - where Evelyn really was. I had thought I had gone to visit only Evelyn that day. But I was sent to the wrong room because God wanted me to visit both ladies.

Cleopas and his comrade were on the wrong road at the wrong time for the right reason. They thought they were going home in defeat but were really on the road to be met and instructed by Jesus, their resurrected Lord. From despair they moved to energy saying, "***Were not our hearts burning within us when he spoke?***" They were there not just for a Resurrection Appearance, but so that understanding that appearance would make them Resurrection People.

The call to be 'Resurrection People' witnessing to the risen Christ is a complete turn around. They thought they were has-been followers of one who wasn't who they hoped he was. Now they are excited followers of one who was so much more than they could have ever imagine. Jesus, in grace, met them where they were on the road out of history but did not leave where he found them. Their whole lives were turned around. Which, of course is just what they did - immediately - turn around, that is, and take the road back to the disciples; back to the community of resurrection faith; back to being participant's in Christ's story; back to the presence of Christ at the Lord's Table. Their walk back to Jerusalem and the disciples and Christ's Table, was like the winding of a spring that would release and send them all out, expanding the Easter faith to the ends of the world.

My husband Will comes from a long line of mission and clergy types. His grandfather Browne wrote a family history he entitled, "Burning Hearts and Itching Feet." It celebrates the gracious gift by God of hearts on joyous fire for Christ and of feet anxious to take the gospel along whatever road Christ might direct- the U.S., China, Brazil, Mozambique, Pakistan, and India. Always on fire, always moving further out.

It is no coincidence that Jesus was recognized as who he really was when he broke bread at table. This was the first time since the Last Supper before the crucifixion. In that moment, the walkers' home table (small 't') became the Lord's Table (capital 'T'). That Table is the place where the presence, of God-in-Christ, is most powerfully and sacramentally present.

That road and that Table have led the faith even to us. We are now a part of that road and Christ's family at that Table. I give witness to you today that Christ has walked me far further than I ever imagined. Every road has turned out to be en route to new encounters and expanding work with you, Christ's 'Resurrection People!'

I also give witness that the Table has been present on every road I have travelled. It is the Table of transcendent power and omnipresent location. I have come to the Table in

Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Japan, France, England, Korea, California, Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, Delaware, Kentucky, Texas, Florida, in churches, in homes, at nursing homes, assisted living and retirement communities and even in hospitals. Everywhere and every time I come to the Table, I have experienced the Risen Christ. The presence of Christ is always there and it is always sacramental. It is the Lord's Table! Your lives and my life are either journeys of happenstance or God's intention. In hearing the story of the Walk to Emmaus, we understand that their transformation can be our transformation. Christ is with us, too, in broken bread and poured cup. Like them we receive, and are invited to share, the life-altering gospel understanding of Christ's resurrection. And, like them, we get to invite people to come to the Table, the Lord's Table – there to dine with one another as 'Resurrection People' with the Holy One who is Risen, now and forever.

Amen.