

April 10, 2005
Easter 3

“Walking with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus”

LUKE 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." ²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ {²⁶ Or Messiah; also in verse ⁴⁶} have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Little children love stories and songs that relate to the world in which they are living. I think of a taped song that we played for our kids when they were very small that had these words in them: "I roll the ball to daddy, he rolls it back to me. Roll the ball, roll the ball..." The song connected with the little children because they had those special moments in their lives where they did roll the ball to daddy and he rolled it back to them.

We can relate to the words just read to you about the two disciples walking to Emmaus because we have had times in our lives when waves of sorrow and sadness just seemed to roll over us and pin us down, and leave us almost without any feeling of hope. We can relate to this account because we have had those special moments in life when Jesus came

to us, showed us who he was and showed how much he loves us. Those moments have been some of the best moments of our lives.

Have you ever wished you could be a little child again, laughing as you rolled the ball to daddy and he rolled it back to you again? Or what about that moment when you first fell in love with the person that has been your partner for all these years? What if the best years of your life are still ahead of you? Picture yourself walking down the road of life, experiencing a low moment. We know those times will come. Then picture Jesus coming to you and blessing you with his love as he did these two disciples.

1) The road of life will never be free from sorrow

If you look at the past roads that you have traveled, you will have to admit that some of the days on the road of life have been quite nasty and mean to you. That certainly was true of the two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus late in the afternoon on the day that Jesus rose from the dead. We are told, "They were talking with each other about everything that had happened." There are days that it is hard to make sense of what is happening. Bad things do happen to good people, and bad things even happen to God's people. The death of Jesus in Jerusalem seemed to be something bad that happened in Jerusalem when things got out of hand. They did not see the hand of God in history reaching out to rescue the world from sin through Jesus death on the cross, just as we have a hard time seeing good coming out of our bad situations in life.

The gloom and sorrow in their hearts can be seen even more in their response to a stranger who joins them on the road and begins talking to them. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus came near to them and walked along with them.

Oh, do you not love these words, "Jesus came near to them and walked with them." Jesus has a plan for these disciples. He wants to help them see that the sorrow in their hearts is totally unfounded. How many times will Jesus come to you in your life to show that some of the fear, and pain, and sorrow you are going through is nothing compared to the love he has for you? We are told that they were kept from recognizing him. The Greek word almost has a picture of their eyes being pinched shut so they could not recognize him immediately.

Now watch Jesus as he begins to lead them out of their darkness, their sorrow and their fear. Jesus asks them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" These two companions were doing more than just casually discussing things. They were literally throwing words at each other, as people do when they are filled with grief and sorrow. They threw out angry words in their frustration, as people do with their family and friends. They share their frustration with Jesus who is a total stranger to them. "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there these days." Can't you see what I am going through? Can't you understand what I am feeling? In the lowest moments of life we expect people to know what we are going through, because it seems so obvious to us. The pain is so great and real, we cannot imagine that a husband or wife, mom or dad, son or daughter cannot see what we are going through.

Jesus asked the simple question, "What things?" The answer that came back shows how

disappointed they were and how angry they were and how afraid they were. "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before and all the people." Is that all Jesus was, just a prophet? Was his life snuffed out like a candle by the angry mob in Jerusalem, without any meaning and purpose? They even complain to this stranger that it has been three days and he has not returned as he has said. They complained that others had seen the empty tomb, but they did not find Jesus. They even complain that they thought Jesus would redeem or rescue Israel from its subjugation under Rome. They totally lost sight of who Jesus was, and why he had come to this earth.

How do you keep the big picture of life in mind, especially when life deals you a nasty blow? You didn't get the job you wanted. The marriage is starting to fail. You lose someone you really love. You never reach the goals you had once set for yourself. Some days it is tough to put one foot ahead of the other and keep going. It is so hard just to see Jesus, who he is, the love he has for you, and the glory of the kingdom that he has which will last forever.

In Ephesians 3 the Apostle Paul has this amazing prayer, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge." That prayer was prayed because the road of life is a tough road, where we can lose sight of Jesus and how wide and long and high and deep his love is for us.

Some of the worst moments in your life have come when you sank so deep that you lashed out in anger to God as Job once did, and as these two fellows were doing as they told Jesus, "Don't you know the things that have happened these days?" They did not speak these words with joy and love in their hearts. There was disgust and disdain for the bad hand that life had dealt them and fear about the failure of putting their faith in Jesus.

2) The road of life will always have Jesus near

The road of life on which you travel will never be free from sorrow or weak moments. It will also be a road where Jesus is always near. Before he ascended to heaven he promised us, "Lo, I am with you always." Notice how he draws close to these sad disciples in a special way.

Jesus levels with them and tells them how foolish they were. "How foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe all that prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Jesus calls them "foolish." I don't like someone to call me foolish, except in one area of life and that is putting my trust in Jesus. If my faith is weak, and I don't see Jesus suffering, death, and resurrection as clearly as I should, then I want someone to call me a fool and say, "Don't be so foolish, look at what Jesus did for you, see how much he loves you and cares about you."

The other day I was driving down the street and saw a large flag displayed on a garage. It has been there ever since September 11. Remember all the flags that were flying, and the patriotism that swept across the nation. How easy it is to forget what we went through, or forget the sacrifices that have been made to make our country a safer place in which

to live. It is so easy to forget the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, the nail wounds in his hands, and his words "As the Father has loved me so I have loved you." What if I could look into a hole such as this hole in this piece of paper and see what hell is really like and what I deserve for my sin, and what Jesus experienced for me? Jesus told these disciples, "Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" There is no other way to salvation.

Then Jesus, who was still a stranger to these travelers, began to open the Scriptures to them as he walked with them along the way. He simply began taking these two fellows through the Old Testament, showing them from the fall into sin, from the promise given to Moses, from the words of Isaiah, from the words of David that the Messiah had to come to suffer and die for sin and then rise again from the dead. The time went so fast, that when they arrived at their destination, they pleaded with Jesus, "Stay with us" or "Abide with us." They could not get enough of his words of peace and comfort. When they sat down to eat their meal, the hands of Jesus broke bread and gave thanks. They saw the hands and they were no longer the hands of the stranger. They saw the nail prints in the hands and they knew it was Jesus. How often will the Holy Spirit help you see the nail marks in the hands of Jesus as you travel down the road of life, especially in those low moments and difficult moments? How often will the Holy Spirit open the Scriptures for you and make the promises real to you?

These disciples saw Jesus and then he disappeared. Then they asked each other, "Were our hearts not burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" If you take all the happiest moments in your life, even those moments when you were a little child, and your daddy was rolling the ball to you and your rolled it back to him, they cannot compare or hold a candle to the greatest moments of life that are still waiting for you as Jesus comes to you and the Holy Spirit opens the Scriptures to you and helps you see Jesus.

The disciples could not stay in Emmaus. They returned at once to Jerusalem, in the dark, running as fast as they could, and out of breath and carried the message, "It is true the Lord has risen!" They shared what had happened on that road to Emmaus. The greatest moments of your life cannot be kept hidden under a basket or in the heart. "It is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

The road to Emmaus, that's the road we are traveling on this week again. Sorrows will come, but Jesus will always be there. Amen