

“ON THE ROAD AGAIN”

By Rev. Victor Kim

Luke 24:13-35

(04-26-20)

No one knows where Emmaus is, it's never been found by archaeologists, but that hasn't stopped people from claiming that they know where it is, or was. Like almost every place connected with a biblical reference in Israel, multiple sites claim a connection with the biblical Emmaus. What we do know about Emmaus is that our text says that it's about seven miles from Jerusalem. I'm not sure that the precise distance is so important; what's more important is that it's not Jerusalem, that Emmaus is a different place. More on that later.

Luke records that on the day that Jesus was resurrected, the first Easter, two of the disciples of Jesus, Cleopas and an unnamed companion, were on their way to a village called Emmaus. As Cleopas and his companion were walking, Jesus joined them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. **This is not the first time that people don't recognize the resurrected Jesus.** Mary, who of all the disciples, might have loved Jesus the most, didn't recognize Jesus in the garden on that first Easter morning. She mistook him for the gardener! **There is something different about Jesus after the resurrection.** He is able to move through locked doors, appearing and disappearing at will. Cleopas and his friend are traveling on the road and suddenly, there's Jesus. Where did he come from? Jesus asked the two what they were talking about and Cleopas answered, *are you the only one who doesn't know what's taken place in Jerusalem over the past few days?*
Jesus of Nazareth, a mighty prophet, was crucified.

We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel, that he was the Messiah. And, besides, this morning, some of our friends came back from his tomb and reported that it was empty and that they had seen angels who told them that this Jesus was alive. Given how much Cleopas knows, **how is it possible that he doesn't recognize Jesus?**

The text says that their eyes **were kept from** recognizing Jesus. And indeed they didn't recognize Jesus, **not on the road** to Emmaus, when Jesus opened up the scriptures to them, interpreting the things about himself in the scripture. It's only when they sat down for a meal at the end of the day and Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them, **it's only then that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus**, who immediately vanished from their sight. When Cleopas and his friend finally recognized who it was that had been walking with them that day, that it had been Jesus all along who had been interpreting scripture to them, that it was Jesus who caused their hearts to burn as he spoke to them and shared scripture with them, when they recognized the resurrected Christ, they ran back to Jerusalem in the middle of the night.

Having been met by the risen Lord, Cleopas and his friend, along with the rest of the disciples who had also been encountered by the resurrected Jesus, were commissioned by Jesus to be the witnesses of the good news that God has accomplished in his Son, and their lives were never again the same.

The claim of Easter is that Jesus is risen, that he is alive and that he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. Our faith as an Easter people also claims that we

recognize this resurrected Jesus in our lives today, not in the sudden appearance of Jesus in the flesh, but through seeing Jesus being embodied in certain people in certain situations, and also through a spiritual connection with the risen Christ. You know what I mean.

Sometimes we encounter a situation in which someone acts with such love or compassion, or someone stands so courageously for justice at enormous cost to themselves, that we say that in that person we saw Jesus. Or we have experienced those moments where we know we have been loved, where we have felt an unexplainable peace, when we know that we have been in the presence of our risen Lord.

Earlier, Anne-Marie asked the children whether they could think of a recent time in their lives when they recognized Jesus. **Now, I wonder whether any of us have had any difficulty in recognizing Jesus.** I wonder whether in light of our being encountered by the risen Christ this Easter, we find that Jesus is somehow different. **If he isn't, if he is easily recognizable, if he's just as he's always been for us, I wonder whether or not we might be missing something.** If we can close and lock the doors, to our hearts, to those private places in our lives which we don't want anyone else to have access to, and if Jesus never gets past those locked doors, if he doesn't suddenly appear out of nowhere and startle us, offering us his shalom, his peace, **I wonder whether we aren't missing the point.** Shouldn't it be the case that the resurrected Jesus ought not to be as predictable as we have made him out to be?

If not even a stone that weighed thousands of pounds could keep Jesus locked in his tomb, if not even death could contain him, **how is it that we can so easily keep Jesus out of the parts of our lives that we would rather keep to our own selves?**

I wonder about why this story is in the Bible. I don't think it's about the disciples who walk with Jesus. Cleopas isn't all that interesting and his friend doesn't even warrant a name! I think the reason this story is in scripture, and the fact that the story takes place on the same day as Jesus' resurrection serves to emphasize it, is that the resurrected Jesus isn't only the same as the Jesus who was crucified. To be clear, we believe that the Jesus who was crucified is the Jesus who was resurrected, there's been no switch, **but the resurrected Jesus isn't meant to be a return to the past, but rather an invitation to the future.**

Part of being a resurrection people is to have new eyes with which to see, to see Jesus and to see one another. **I think that the point of the Emmaus story is to help us have new eyes to see so that we might actually recognize the risen Jesus in our midst in new ways.** It's about being on the road again with Jesus, to discover where he's going and how we might best follow. These days it's not always the case that our eyes are kept from recognizing Jesus in our midst as much as that we choose not to open our eyes and see the risen Christ. But if we have been joined by the risen one on our journeys, if the spirit of God has opened the scriptures to us and has fed us with the living bread, we've got to acknowledge the presence of the holy Christ in our midst especially in the midst of places and possibilities which we just couldn't have imagined.

At the beginning of this sermon I said that the precise distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus isn't all that important, **but that what's more important is that Emmaus isn't Jerusalem.** They may only be a few miles apart, but they aren't the same place. Jesus joins Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to a place which is not Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a place we know too well; it's the place where we think we can recognize Jesus. But Emmaus is different, it's unexpected, it's out of our comfort zone, **it's where Jesus gets revealed all over again in new ways.**

You talk about unexpected, outside our comfort zones, **don't we know what that means!** The past weeks and months have been a challenge unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. So I wonder about how Jesus is revealing himself to us, to his people, in this time of unexpectedness, this season of discomfort and disorientation? **This is an Emmaus time for the church, for us.** We are no longer in Jerusalem, no longer in that place where things are predictable, where we know how to think and behave and plan. **We are on the road again with Jesus and our eyes need to be opened to see him in contexts for which we have not been prepared.** Our hearts and spirits and lives need to be open to the resurrected Jesus who invites us to see him and experience him in ways we couldn't have imagined.

How do we embody Jesus to people from whom we must be bodily distant? I am heartened by the creativity and imagination of so many who are trying to show something of Jesus in this time of social distancing. If you've gotten our bulletins for this week, you will be reminded that we have people in our congregation who are offering to pick up groceries or deliver meals for people who

don't feel like venturing out or are limited in their ability to get out. Others, as you heard me say at the beginning of our service, are offering their experience and expertise through opportunities for exploring self-care so that we might stay same through these crazy times. I'm not sure that was on our list of church programs that we were going to offer when we started this year. **That's an Emmaus move, to have our eyes and lives opened to new ways of seeing Jesus in others and embodying Jesus to them. And it's an Easter move of imagination and possibility.**

What does it mean to be the church in times like this? What does it mean to be the body of Christ when our bodies cannot be close, when we cannot hold those who are hurting, when the tragedy of what took place in Nova Scotia this past week is compounded by the fact that those who are grieving must do so without the usual expressions of comfort, care and condolence? **I know, however, that the spirit of the risen Christ, the Jesus who meets us on the road again to all the Emmaus' of our lives, is being revealed in new ways,** for example in the virtual vigil that was held for the victims of the mass shooting. Tens of thousands of Canadians joined that vigil online to express our solidarity with those who lost loved ones and whose lives will never be the same again.

We have also grown in our appreciation for those who we may have taken for granted before. Not only for those front line medical workers who we admire and whose gifts we acknowledge, those first responders including our police officers who put their lives at risk every day, but also for those unsung support workers, for those who toil in the difficult and often underappreciated work, especially in our senior's and long term care centers, maybe even for those in government who are

tasked with leading us through a crisis that nobody could have truly been prepared for.

Over the next several weeks, I will be inviting people like Richard Topping and Ross Lockhart to join me on Sundays in conversation sermons as we explore what it means to be the church in times like this and how can the church be missional in a time of social distancing. I hope you'll join us as we open ourselves to the new ways that Jesus invites us to see and live and love.

Being on the road again with Jesus to Emmaus, wherever that may be for us, is a story of our time today. It reminds us that we often don't recognize Jesus in new contexts until he opens our eyes, that like Mary at the tomb Easter morning, we need to hear our names being called or like Cleopas and his friend later that day, we need to sit together and break bread, **that it's in these acts of community and in the naming of relationships that we see with new eyes and learn to love and live with new hope.**

Remember, our present situation will not last forever. There will be a time when we can get back together again, worship together again, grieve on each other's shoulders, return to the vocations and activities that bring us meaning and enjoyment. And when we do, I pray that what we are learning now on the road again with Jesus, **the newness which Jesus is teaching us by which to love, to live and to see, will remain with us and grow in us so that we will continue in our faith as a people of new imagination, new possibility and new hope.**

Thanks be to God, Amen!

Written by Rev. Victor Kim.

*Preached on 26 April 2020 at Richmond Presbyterian Church
without members in attendance due to COVID-19 Crisis then posted online.*