

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Luke 24:13-35

Sermon Title: "The Divine Meets the Human, and Transformation Occurs"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

April 3, 2016

I have the most difficult time remembering people's names. I recognize a person's face – I rarely forget a face – but to remember the person's name is nearly impossible. There are many times I will see somebody at a Presbytery meeting, or somebody will come to worship who has been here before, and I smiled and greeted them warmly, but sometimes the name escapes me.

On the TV show *Modern Family*, the character Phil Dunphy is a realtor who says he could never forget a name. His system for remembering names is quite wacky, for instance, he told his wife Claire that he once met a man by the name of Carl. {SLIDE} He remembered his name, because Carl was wearing a Grateful Dead T-shirt, and which rock band is like the Grateful Dead? Fish. And where do fish live? In the ocean. And what else lives in the ocean? Coral. So the man's name was Carl. I personally don't care to use such a system to remember names. I'll just try to listen more carefully.

In the Gospel of Luke, two disciples of Jesus are

walking to a town called Emmaus. {SLIDE} Emmaus is about 7 miles northwest of Jerusalem, so it would take the men several hours to reach town.<sup>1</sup> Along the way, they are discussing the big news of the week. It would be like talking about the presidential primaries or the bombings in Paris and Belgium. We are not let into the conversation, but they must have been animated about discussing Jesus' crucifixion and death. The men know about Jesus' body being placed in the tomb. They know about guards being placed around the tomb for safe keeping.

But the big news today is about Jesus' escape from this tomb.<sup>2</sup> The stone was rolled away and the burial clothes no longer hold a body. Their Crucified Leader is walking around now, alive and kicking, as though he had never been killed. The disciples cannot wrap their heads around such strange events. How is this possible? Has anybody seen Jesus and spoken with him?

As the disciples explore the meaning of Jesus' resurrection, they are greeted by a man who asks to walk with them. The story lets us know that the man is Jesus himself, the same person about whom the disciples are talking. But the disciples aren't told who this man is. They know Jesus' name, but they cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:13.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:

recognize his face. The story says the disciples' eyes are kept from recognizing him. The Greek word used here means that their eyes are taken hold of, seized by something which keeps them from seeing. The same Greek word is used in another story when Herod seizes John the Baptist, arrests him for things John said against him. The disciples' eyes are under arrested, restrained, held against their will.

Why is this the case? Why don't the disciples recognize Jesus instantly, when he appears to them? A year ago I was at the airport, waiting for my sister to arrive from Maryland. I scanned every face in the crowd until I came across the one face that I recognized. It was as though all the unfamiliar faces evaporated, so that I could see clearly my sister's face. Why didn't it happen that way for the disciples? They could have been in the middle of their loud conversation, and Jesus could have approached, and it could have taken them a second or two to see him, but when they did their eyes and mouths could have turned into large saucers. They could have lost their breath and almost collapsed to the ground. The moment would have been priceless. What joy they could have experienced, hugging Jesus and laughing their fool-heads off and walking to Emmaus with air under their feet.

But it doesn't happen that way, does it? The disciples' eyes remain arrested. Not even Jesus' voice is recognizable, when he asks, "What kind of conversation is this that you are having, which is making you so sad?"<sup>3</sup> The one disciple's name is Cleopas and he asks, "What are you, some stranger from Jerusalem who doesn't know about the big news? Haven't you been watching the television? Haven't you been following the posts on Facebook? The big news is about Jesus of Nazareth. You know? Mighty prophet. Great teacher. Got arrested by the chief priests. Crucified by the Romans. We hear that he rose from the dead. He left his tomb, alive and well. The women saw it. Angels greeted them at the tomb."<sup>4</sup> Do you get it now, stranger?"

Oh, Jesus gets it perfectly well. It is Cleopas and his friend who do not get it.

We go back to our initial question: Why didn't the disciples instantly recognize Jesus at the moment he appeared? A well-known preacher and teacher to pastors, Fred Craddock, says that there is more involved here "than their blindness due to shock [that their Savior was actually standing there alive,] or an inability to recognize Jesus due to some

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:17.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Luke 24:19-24.

transformation of his appearance [since he had just risen from the tomb and had a resurrected body.” Craddock suggests that Luke, the author, liked to mix “divine action and human freedom.”<sup>5</sup> {SLIDE}

Apparently, Luke loved to write stories about the amazing acts of Jesus Christ, and then tell us the human reactions, which were filled with doubt and astonishment and even rejection. For some the sinful human response was not to believe, and even to walk away. For some, it took time to come to faith.

We could point to a bunch of instances in Luke’s Gospel, but let us just point to the time that Jesus declared that he would be arrested, beaten, and killed, but on the third day rise from the grave. He told the disciples three different times that this was going to happen – there was no chance of stopping it. How did the disciples respond? {SLIDE} In Luke 9, right after Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ of God, Jesus strictly informs his followers that the Christ of God “must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”<sup>6</sup> Luke tells us that the disciples said nothing after hearing this. They might have been too shocked to respond. Peter wasn’t so shocked, because we learn in

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<sup>5</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Luke*, 285.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:21-22.

Matthew and Mark that he took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking such nonsense. We know how that turned out: Jesus said, “Satan, get behind me, for you are not mindful of the things of God.”<sup>7</sup>

**{SLIDE}** The second time Jesus predicted his death in Luke 9, it says that the disciples didn’t understand, and “it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it, and they were afraid to ask him about” his words.<sup>8</sup> The third time happens in Luke 18: Jesus says that they are going to Jerusalem, and he will be delivered to the Gentiles to be mocked and insulted and spat on, and then beaten and killed. But on the third day he would rise. Again, Luke tells us that Jesus’ words were hidden from the disciples, and “they did not know the things which were spoken.”<sup>9</sup>

On three separate occasions, Jesus tells his followers exactly what is going to happen, but they didn’t get it. What Jesus told them seemed like bad news, not transformational news. Not yet. In Luke 24, Cleopas and Friend may talk and talk and talk all they want on their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but all they do is share news and offer pundit-like commentary.

**{SLIDE}** Jesus is risen from the dead – this is a

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 16:23 (also Mark 8:33).

<sup>8</sup> Luke 9:45.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:34.

major story. But to the disciples it remains just a major story. It is not a transformational story, at least not yet. Cleopas and Friend are astonished to hear such an incredible tale about their Leader, but they are not ready or even able to handle the impact that such an incredible story would have on their lives.

We cannot get down on the disciples too much. We cannot blame Cleopas and Friend for not seeing Jesus and understanding everything. We might not have fared any better. We too might have had our eyes arrested, and our minds fettered. We have good news, just not transformational news yet.

Divine action mixes with sinful human freedom not to believe, and the result is transformation. When we encounter Christ we might not understand, we might doubt, but what inevitably occurs is open eyes. What unavoidably will happen is clear minds, welcoming hearts, and transformed beings. Jesus does let Cleopas and Friend linger in their disbelief. Jesus teaches them everything that they should have already known. He puts the puzzle pieces together, so that they may see the larger picture of why Jesus needed to be arrested, beaten, crucified, and then raised.

Who knows how far they traveled, or how long Jesus kept them hanging. Jesus walks all the way to the outskirts of Emmaus. He indicates that he is

going to keep walking, but the two disciples are already hooked. The scales are falling from their eyes. They understand more clearly God's saving will for creation.

**{SLIDE}** During one of the holiest moments does everything finally come together. Jesus reenacts the Lord's Supper. Whether Jesus says, "This is my body broken for you" or not, the disciples instantly recognize the movement. They know it to be Jesus sitting at the table with them. And then he vanishes. And then they finally receive the transformational news of his resurrection. "Didn't our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road...?"<sup>10</sup> Why didn't we get it before? Why couldn't we see who our Companion was? This is not the time for the disciples to get down on themselves. There is no time to waste on debating what should have been. Cleopas and Friend get it – they are transformed by their encounter with Christ. Their eyes are no longer arrested. Neither are their minds and lips and feet. They run back to Jerusalem, all seven miles, to report what just happened to them, because such good news is transformational news, and everybody has got to hear it.

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:32.

The rest of the disciples didn't get it either, not until after the stone was rolled away from the tomb. Not until Jesus appeared to them as the resurrected Christ. Not until Thomas could touch the holes in Jesus' hands and side. Mary Magdalene visits the tomb after the stone is rolled away, and she doesn't get it until Jesus calls her by name.<sup>11</sup>

Divine action mixes with our sinful human responses. It may seem that our responses are winning – we keep on doubting, we keep on rejecting. But our responses do not endure. When Christ reveals himself to us, we will be transformed. Make no mistake. We may be overcome with work schedules and family concerns and frustrating situations, and still our eyes will be opened to see Christ, who walks with us, who makes his will known.

**{SLIDE}** When we celebrate Communion together, we agree that what is happening is an encounter with the Resurrected Christ. When the bread is broken, we understand how much Christ suffered to make us right with God. When the cup is poured, we know how much energy and effort Christ brought forth to make sure our sins were washed away. None of us could ever do what Christ did, but then none of us were

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. John 20:1-31.

supposed to do what he did. Only Christ could: fully human, fully God, willing to break his body and spill his blood so that we may be transformed, renewed, saved for an eternity with God.

Christ will always enter our schedules to make sure we understand this. Christ will use what it takes – the Bible, the Sacraments, worship, fellowship, ministry, mission, tithing – to make us aware of his saving grace. Our eyes are arrested no more. Our minds are free to recognize Christ's presence. Such good news is transformational news, and everybody has got to hear it.

**Assurance of Pardon:**

Hear the Good News: what we deserve to have, Jesus has carried for us: sin and destruction and death. Jesus is the source of eternal life, and we can have such life when we accept him and believe. Believe this good news, brothers and sisters: In Jesus Christ you and I are forgiven! Thanks be to God! Amen.