

“Best Walk Ever” Luke 13:13-35

It was only an 11 km journey, one that could easily be accomplished in a couple of hours, and Cleopas had taken that journey hundreds of times. Since he was a boy, he had made the journey from his village in Emmaus to Jerusalem and back. The last time he had left his village to journey to Jerusalem he was filled with so much hope and joy he almost ran the whole way. He had heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming to Jerusalem, and Cleopas was convinced this Jesus must be the Messiah. It was the week before Passover – what better time for Jesus to declare to the world that he was the Messiah?

That was seven days ago - Sunday. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem with a great parade of followers, celebrating and shouting out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Cleopas had joined that crowd, and everyone felt this had to be the day Jesus would be crowned the true king of Israel.

But Jesus would not be crowned that day, nor the next. In fact, the closest Jesus got to wearing a crown was on Friday, when the Romans put a crown of thorns on his head as they prepared to crucify him. Jesus was given the title “King of the Jews” by Pilate, the Roman official who condemned Jesus to die, but it was scribbled on a board nailed above the head of Jesus on his cross. Yes, a cross. Three days ago Jesus was crucified like a common criminal, and after he died he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Cleopas was now on his way home to Emmaus. He traveled with another follower of Jesus who had come from the village, and like Cleopas, his heart was broken at what he had seen happen to Jesus. That 11 km walk started out to be the worst walk ever, but before it ended up being the best walk ever. What could have changed that journey so much?

The story is told in Luke 24:13-35. Let’s read it...

For Cleopas and his unnamed companion, this had been the worst weekend ever. They had gone to Jerusalem with so much hope, and now their hope had died with Jesus. As they walked home they talked about what had happened that weekend. It did not make sense to them. It was never supposed to end this way...

As they talked, Jesus joined them. They did not recognize him, for “their eyes were holden,” the King James Version says, which simply means, they were prevented from recognizing him. Jesus had a resurrection body, but also the disciples never expected to see Jesus again. They had buried him.

As Jesus so often does, he engages them in a conversation by asking a question. “What are you discussing?” he asked.

With sorrow written all over their faces, Cleopas replies, “You must be the only one in all Jerusalem who does not know what happened this weekend.”

Jesus keeps the conversation going by asking, “What things?”

Jesus was a master at engaging people, getting them to open up and share their story. He did it without being pushy or nosy. With a simple question he opened the door for the other person to tell their story.

When he met the Samaritan woman at the well he started with the question, “Will you give me a drink?” and finally gave her a chance to tell her story by asking, “Go, call your husband...”

To the cripple at the pool of Bethesda Jesus simply asked, “Do you want to get well?”

When Jesus arrives in Bethany after his friend Lazarus dies, his question to Mary, the sister of Lazarus, is simple, “Where have you buried him?”

Of course, if you are going to ask a question like this, you must be willing to take the time to listen to the answer. Jesus now listens as Cleopas and his companion explain what happened in Jerusalem that weekend.

They told about Jesus, how he was a prophet, “powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.” They recounted how the religious leaders had Jesus put to death and how he was crucified. They told how they had hoped Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would redeem the people, setting them free from their oppressors. But a dead Messiah is no good to anyone.

They also told about the events of that morning; how women had gone to the tomb and found it empty. Angels, they claim, told them Jesus was alive, but when some of the disciples checked it out, they did not see Jesus.

Then, as briefly outlined in verses 25-27, Jesus set the record straight. He explained to them what scriptures really said about the Messiah, including the fact that he had to suffer. No doubt he reminded them of passages like Isaiah 53 where we read:

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

When the threesome arrive in Emmaus it appears Jesus would keep going, but Cleopas and his friend insist that he stay with them for the evening. It was too late to travel.

This was one of the best decisions these men ever made. Though showing hospitality was a virtue praised in that day, it would have been easy after that crazy weekend to just let Jesus

keep going. But something had been stirred inside of them as this stranger spoke. Later they would say, “Our hearts burned within us.”

Here is another fact that we must hold onto: when we are in the presence of Jesus, our hearts will be changed. If we are open to him, ready to receive him, he will change us. The fear will disappear. The hatred will melt away and be replaced with love. Forgiveness will start to flow from our lives. Hope will replace despair.

Being in the presence of Jesus always changes us for the good. So why do so many people want to avoid his presence? They avoid church, and worship services like this. They will not read their Bibles or pray. Even people who call themselves Christians seem to avoid being in the presence of Jesus – is it because they do not want to be changed?

Cleopas and his friend invite Jesus into their home, and a most wonderful thing happens. As Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, their eyes were opened. They realized that they had been walking with the resurrected Jesus! He truly was alive!

Nicky Gumble, founder of the Alpha program, tells the story of a Christian who worked for a prestigious newspaper in England. Down in the basement they had an archive with all kinds of clippings on anyone who was of importance. The room, which was full of files, was divided into two categories: living and dead. One day this member of Nicky Gumble’s church was working in the archive, and when no one was looking, he moved the file of Jesus Christ from the “dead persons” side to the “living.”

At that table when Jesus broke the bread, Jesus’ file moved from the dead side to the living side for Cleopas and his friend.

Once Jesus was recognized, he disappeared.

Cleopas and his companion quickly made their way back to Jerusalem. They did not care that it was now dark and the road was dangerous. They had a message that could not wait. When they found the eleven disciples they had to wait while they were told how Jesus appeared to Peter. **Then they got to tell about the best walk ever!**

Every time I preach from this passage I say, “I would have loved to have been one of those disciples who got to walk with Jesus, and be taught by him. How blessed those men were...”

This morning I want to share some wonderful news with you. We **ALL** can walk with Jesus like those men did, and we too can be taught by Jesus. This is the promise we find in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In John chapter 14 Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. Jesus knew that after the cross, he would ascend back up into heaven, and the disciples would feel like they had been abandoned, that they were all alone. They would feel like Cleopas and his companion felt when they started the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

So listen to what Jesus says to the disciples before he leaves.

First, he promises them that they will receive “another advocate” or “Comforter” as the KJV translates it. The word used here means someone who will come alongside of you to help you. Jesus is speaking about the Holy Spirit. In a few weeks we will celebrate Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church.

I want us to hear how the Holy Spirit with us today allows us to have our own Emmaus experience even now!

1. Jesus says, “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you” (John 14:18).

Just as Cleopas and his companion were not left alone because Jesus was still alive, and he would walk with them, so the Holy Spirit brings the presence of Jesus into our lives today. Jesus walks with us through the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of Jesus” (cf. Acts 16:7)

So do not be surprised if you suddenly become aware of the presence of Jesus as you worship, or study the scriptures or pray. He has not left us – he is still with us through the Holy Spirit.

2. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will “teach us all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

I have wanted to join that class on the road to Emmaus for years. But here Jesus reminds us, you are in that same class already. Jesus says, “I am teaching you today, even as I taught Cleopas and his companion so long ago.” The Holy Spirit will be your teacher, who will help you understand the scriptures and remember them. If we want to learn, Jesus is more than willing to teach us through the Holy Spirit.

3. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.” (John 14:27)

Something shifted inside Cleopas as he walked with Jesus and listened to his words. That same kind of internal shift happens to believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit brings peace. He also brings love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness and self control. The Apostle Paul calls this the fruit of the Spirit’s presence.

The greatest sense of peace comes when we know we are saved and we will go to heaven when this life is through. Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Over the next few weeks we will discover more about the coming of the Holy Spirit and what that means for us as the followers of Jesus, but this morning I want you to know that the wonderful experience of the Risen Jesus Cleopas had on the road to Emmaus can be yours today as well. This is what is promised us by Jesus through the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who will make this walk through life the best walk ever – it is a walk with Jesus!