

April 11, 2021 – (2nd Sunday of Easter – Emmaus Road)

Sermon Text – Luke 24:13-35

- While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him...As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. -

Human beings were built for walking. That's you and me. We have the perfect, or at least the best, anatomy of any of God's creatures, for upright, two-legged, forward motion. We're good at a few other variations also. We're good at running, skipping, hopping and jumping, but we are best at walking. It's one of the first things we learn to do in life, after rolling and crawling, and it's one of the last things we ever want to give up in life, at least if we are not forced to by frailness or disability. If the calculations are correct, it is likely that Jesus walked more than 20,000 miles in his lifetime. St. Paul walked more than 14,000 miles and that was just during the time of his missionary journeys. And Jesus' first major walk was more than 400 miles long, from Egypt back home to Nazareth, when he was just a young boy!

So, as we continue our reading of Luke's account of that first Easter morning, we encounter two of Jesus' disciples doing what they were created to do best, walking. They are on their way to their home. They are going to Emmaus. They are travelling just seven miles, but they are on their way. They are up and moving. They have decided that they can no longer sit still. This means, theologically, that they are

open to learning something about their relationship with God. Think about the people of Israel wandering for 40 years in the Sinai desert. They were walking during much of that time. Walking and wondering which way they should be going. Waiting for the time when God would lead them back to the Promised Land. While they were walking, they were dependent upon the provisions provided by God, the water from the rocks and the manna from the sky. Or later in their history, returning from the exile in Babylon, when God has cleared the path and made straight the highway across the Arabian Peninsula, they are led straightaway as they return to their homeland in Israel. They are learning that God has more in mind for them than a life as foreigners in a foreign country. They are to be God's chosen, to live in the land, and to become "a light to all the nations" because of God's special relationship with them.

The disciples have heard nothing of the Easter events, except for the report of the women, which they considered little more than "an idle tale," a completely empty and unbelievable story; or, as one commentator puts it, that the women must be delirious, "out of their...minds." So, they walk, with their heads down, their hearts heavy, their eyes not looking or seeing anything around them, their feet trudging toward the safety and the consolation of home. They are, I would say, "discouraged, disheartened, despondent, depressed and dejected." They have experienced a tremendous shock to their systems. The future will not be the one they had expected. Life triumphant and glorious has become life tragic and hopeless. But they walk. They walk onward, and while they walk, they are joined by someone who remains a stranger while they speak with him on the road. This is a miraculous part of the story.

Luke tells us that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” This was not their own doing. It was done for them, to make them susceptible to the teaching they were about to receive. It’s sort of like a superhero hiding behind a disguise of horn-rimmed glasses or the trappings of wealth and power. We all know, when we read the comic books or see the movies, that Clark Kent is really Superman and Bruce Wayne is the one who watches over the city as Batman, but the characters in the books or movies do not. Their eyes are “kept from recognizing” these heroes for the sake of the story. In this story it is for the sake of learning that the scriptures are true – they have predicted this turn of events – and that Jesus is forever recognizable in a new and a different way.

I have to say that this is what has always intrigued me about this story, this now you don’t see him, now you do, now you don’t aspect. It’s kind of mysterious. It’s kind of magical. It’s kind of mystifying. It helps us to understand some of the hard to comprehend aspects of our own faith. How is it, for instance, that Jesus is truly present in the bread and the wine of Holy Communion? How can we say that the tiny taste of a tiny meal shared between friends, unites us with the one who is our Lord and Savior? And how is it that one, small morsel and a single, little sip can assure us that we continue to be accompanied by the one who first appeared as a companion to the disciples who were walking the road to Emmaus? And this is just it. It is mysterious. It is magical. It is mystifying. It’s a matter of faith. We can’t recreate it by thinking about it. We can’t make it happen by our own powers of understanding. We can’t grasp what is happening no matter how much effort we might put into it. It

happens because God wants it to happen. It happens because Christ promised that it would. It happens because the Holy Spirit enlightens us, opens our eyes and helps us to see, uses our senses so they we can recognize the one who lives among us and uses our memories to help us recall the events of his life as they are repeated among us right down to the very present. And in so doing, we are assured that Jesus continues to walk with us, to journey with us through life in the midst of whatever circumstance may confront us and to travel down the same roads, the highways and the byways of life, so that we might know that he is always with us. We may not always see him, but he is always there.

The thing about these resurrection stories, this one included, is that when those involved first hear the good news, no one believes. Read across all four of the gospels and you will see. The initial reaction to news of the resurrection is disbelief. But, upon having their eyes “opened,” the disciples cannot wait to tell the others. Immediately after Jesus disappears from their kitchen table, the two get up and race the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others. When they get there, they discover that Jesus has made other appearances. “He has appeared to Simon,” those who are gathered tell them. And then, if we read ahead, in a passage we will skip over in the next weeks, Jesus stands among them and appears to them all at one time. Even then, they are “startled and terrified,” thinking that they are seeing a ghost. But Jesus reassures them. He shows them his hands and his feet, the marks of the nails and the wound of the spear, and he asks for something to eat. They give him some fish and he eats it. Dead people do not do that. Ghosts do not do that.

Resurrection is different. It is amazing. And again, he teaches them, as he had done with the two on the road to Emmaus, opening the scriptures and making known to them all that had been written about him. And then he sends them out as his witnesses to do likewise. This is where we find ourselves in this story. We are still his witnesses, going into the world to tell the good news and to proclaim “repentance and forgiveness of sins to all [the] nations.” It is a big task, but we are many and we continue our walk with Jesus by our side.

Amen.