

Luke 24:13-35

What are you Talking about as you Walk Along?

3rd Sunday of Easter ~ Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion ~ May 1, 2022

Communion Meditation

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Introduction

Back when our younger daughter, Hannah, (now the mother of twenty-two-month Zoey and newborn Grace) was in high school, she and a friend of hers decided to volunteer at our local hospital in Springfield, Ohio. When she got home from her first day of training, I asked her how it went. She said they put her in a unit called, "Same Day." She was confused by that, but didn't want to ask a dumb question at the training. So, she asked me her question: "*Same Day*, what's that supposed to mean? *Same Day* as what?" *We know* it means "Same Day Surgery." But she and her friend didn't have a clue.

The gospel story I am about to read begins with that phrase, "Now on that same day." Just in case you wonder what "same day" Luke is talking about, he's *not* referring to "Same Day Surgery," at least not literally. Unless you consider the world as God's surgical theater, perhaps. I say this because the "same day" here is the day the empty tomb was discovered, the day that we now call Easter. The day on which God mended, repaired, restored our broken hearts and our broken world, by raising Jesus from the dead. The day of days that gives us eternal, abiding hope. God's message of unconditional grace into which we just baptized Willie moments ago.

It's been two weeks since we celebrated Easter. It may seem longer for some of us. But our scripture reading picks up right where we left off on Easter Sunday, that ended with verse 12—with Peter running to the tomb, stooping and looking in, seeing for himself the discarded death shroud of Jesus, and going home amazed at what had happened. We begin now at the next verse, 13 and will stop at verse 35, still long before this "same day" is over.

Communion Meditation

Small talk. Isn't that how you usually start a conversation with a stranger as you are waiting in line at the grocery store or at the post office? The weather might serve, "Will spring ever come this year?" Or the length of the line, "Just my luck to show up when everybody else decided to check out." The person you are addressing may or may not respond: This kind of banter with strangers has gotten trickier in the past couple of years with masks and social distancing. For the introverts among us, this may feel like a "silver lining" bestowed upon you by the pandemic. As Heidi Thiese wrote in a poem in 2020,

*I embrace a new
Introverts' paradise
Reveling in talk no longer smallⁱ*

My husband Bob's mom, Fran, my "mother in love" had little tolerance for "small talk." She much preferred going right into the deeper stuff quickly, even with strangers. She had little

interest in conversation that was “too surfacy.” I will be honest: as a pastor, one of the things I cherish about walking closely with a family through a health crisis or a death is the honest, heart-felt talk that happens quickly, naturally. When we are in a crisis of one kind or another, we jump right into the deep end. Small talk does not serve us. We need to say what is on our minds and hearts, and we are ready to listen. At times like these, we seek the comfort of spiritual communion. It is like water to a parched throat.

Did you notice how Cleopas responds to Jesus when he appears as a stranger catching up with him and his buddy, as they are walking toward Emmaus? He doesn't say to Jesus, “Howdy! Can you believe how *hot* it is today?” Or “What brings *you* to Emmaus today?” When Jesus asks them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along,” he does not deflect with, “Oh, nothing,” for fear of being too political. This stranger could be someone on the “other side” of the political execution that had just taken place. Instead, Cleopas jumps right into the deep end: The political news of the day and their take on it. What happened, their high hopes and their deep regrets. Their talk was honest, personal, vulnerable, and deep.ⁱⁱ

But Jesus does not interrupt them. Nor does he correct or talk over them. As they pour out their grief, their confusion, their regrets, he listens. I dare say, he encourages them to express the full range of their thoughts and feelings, simply by his patient listening. He walked with them, literally and spiritually. Only after they had said all they wanted to say, does he offer *his* honest response: calling them foolish and slow of heart to believe. At that point in the story they neither recognized Jesus, nor did they feel the burning in their hearts.

I love the honesty in this story. Maybe it's because I too am a person who usually does not realize in the moment when something deep, sacred is happening. Maybe that is true for you, too. When a shift in perspective is just *starting* to take place, it's often small and quiet. Like a small ember just starting to ignite with fresh fuel and oxygen. It probably started for them in their heads, as this stranger was teaching them, interpreting scriptures they already knew. While they were walking, talking, listening conversation, it started. But it wasn't until they were sitting at a table, sharing a meal where there was bread and wine. That was when the ember turned into fire and the tumblers clicked into place. The past, the present, the future roared: Yes! Christ *is* Risen. And is right here with us. Has been with us as we walked along. The impossible blazed into focus: all was not lost. Here before them, at this table was a new reality, not before imagined. And at that moment, when they saw Christ, he vanished. His work there was done there.

But what about here? Let's consider what is going on in our hearts today. Whatever news source your “go to” may be, Jesus' gospel message in the midst of our muddle may seem like nonsense. Like how the disciples first responded to the women's news about the empty tomb as “*Leros*” in the Greek, or “hogwash.” You may be thinking to yourself, “Really, Preacher?” Resurrection as response to death and destruction? Open your eyes and look around. We are in the midst of a devastating war being waged by Russia on Ukraine that continues to escalate. Over two months into this war and well over two years living in the midst of the COVID confronts us on multiple levels. Even at the grocery store and the gas pump. And let's face it: as

our “herd immunity” to COVID has risen to the point where we are officially past the global pandemic, (thanks be to God), the general deterioration of common civility remains unchecked and continues to grow. If only we had a vaccine to immunize us from the virus of soul-killing social discourse and political acrimony.

Here's the Good News: In Christ, we have something better. I'm sure we wish it was easier, quicker, and more sure fire. Why not give us a “Plug and play” solution. Or just give us a pill that will make it all better. But we know that is not God's way. As Richard Rohr has written, “Revelation is not something we measure, but something or someone we meet!” Yup: it's relational. What part of Jesus' new commandment: to love one another as Christ has loved us, is not relational? And good, healthy relationships often start quietly. Think about your best friend: you and that person started as strangers. And then it grew from there. Probably not overnight.

Perhaps Jesus still seems like a stranger to you. I can tell you: Jesus wants to walk and talk and eat with you. Jesus invites us to the Table, his Table, where you can say, anything, and be heard and understood. Is your world too small for the miracle of Easter, this morning? Our hearts, our minds, our world can be expanded, one conversation at a time at this table. Every conversation that is honest, starts where we are: our hurts and our hopes. Our regrets and our reservations. That's where resurrection begins. That's where Jesus is ready to meet you at the table.

Maybe your world is heavy with disappointment and regret. You can skip the small talk here. I think this gets a little easier as we age. The longer we live, the shorter our patience gets with small talk. We literally lose inches from our height as our bones settle over the years and simultaneously our spiritual capacities have the potential to grow deeper and stronger. On Friday we held our “Service of Witness to the Resurrection” for Bonnie Babler, who lived to be 102 years old, and was a member of FPC for over seventy years. Even a couple months before she died, Bonnie cherished good conversation over dark chocolate, a sacrament in my book 😊. Bonnie's long, faithful life reminded me of the conversation between Alice and the White Queen in Lewis Carroll's book, *Through the Looking Glass*.

Right when the Queen tells Alice that she is 105 years old, Alice says, *“I can't believe that!”* *“Can't you?”* *The queen responds in a pitying tone. “Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”* *Alice laughed. “There is no use trying,” she says. “One can't believe impossible things.”* *“I daresay you haven't had much practice,” the Queen tells her. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast!”*ⁱⁱⁱ

Let's practice now with Jesus, who is calling us to the Table, to talk and listen, to taste and see, the impossibility of the resurrection right here today. Hallelujah.

ⁱ as quoted by Kristy Farber, in her sermon "Hope on the Road," *Journal for Preachers, Easter 2022, p. 10.*]

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.* The idea in this paragraph and the next came from Kristy Farber's sermon, "Hope on the Road," p.11

ⁱⁱⁱ Carroll, Lewis, *Through the Looking Glass*, (Macmillan: United States, 1901), pp. 88-89.