

April 11th message

Welcome to the Sunday after Easter. As you may know, some call this Sunday, low Sunday because of the attendance. To some the joy of Easter is long gone and life returns to the routine. Hopefully that is not the case for us.

I sometimes think of how our lives would be if we didn't have the good news of the resurrection. Think about how we would be living for the day trying to get all we could out of this life while we could. Our values would be different. We would only care about ourselves and our own happiness. We wouldn't care about the welfare of others and sharing the good news of the gospel Jesus taught.

The reading we had today is one of my favorites. We are told this happened on the same day as the resurrection. In the beginning of the chapter, Luke reports how some women went to the tomb to properly prepare the body of Jesus. There had not been time after He had been crucified and the next day had been the Sabbath. So here they were early on that first day of the week, not really knowing how they would even have access. How surprised they were to find no one guarding the tomb and the huge stone rolled away. Luke records how they encountered two men in dazzling clothing and what they said to them. Verse 9 tells how they returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to *all the rest*.

All the rest. We probably haven't thought too much of the others that gathered that first day of the week, but here we have it. One must have been Cleopas who with another companion decided to walk to the neighboring town of Emmaus that very same day. Emmaus was about 7 miles away. Chances are it was a casual walk at about 2 miles an hour; so it would take awhile.

The portrait on the screen is well known. We have it in the hall. You can see Emmaus in the distance. You can also see how Jesus is explaining things to them. While this portrait is a favorite of mine, it probably really wasn't like this. The one of the right shows the terrain much better.

We are told they were kept from recognizing Him. Some commentaries through the years have commented on how they didn't recognize Jesus because they were convinced He was dead and their disappointment so great the thought never crossed their minds. Yet they do not brush off this stranger or consider Him unworthy of their time because He does not seem up to date on what has recently happened.

That in itself is often overlooked in this passage. These disciples include this stranger in their conversation and tell of their hopes they had in the crucified Jesus. There is a lesson right here of course. They were quick to share and involve this new person in their beliefs. While the stranger did inquire about their conversation, many would have been quick to dismiss such a person who seemed uninformed. We've all heard you should not judge a book by its cover and know the implications of that phrase yet we still do.

We live in a time where people are quick to judge and label. We see that all around us. We can be quick to write someone off because they don't view things exactly as we do.

Jesus made it a point to break down the barriers people had created. He was often criticized for associating with tax collectors and other so called sinners. His inner circle also included women who were no more than the second class citizens of the day.

On this note it was interesting for me to read how the role of women had changed in Biblical times. There is much evidence that in ancient Israel, women were very involved in community life. Women participated in commerce and real estate dealings. Although they could not have leadership roles in the temple, women played important roles in the music, prayer life, religious processions, and wedding festivities. There are also several examples of leadership roles women played. Perhaps you remember Miriam, the sister of Moses, who became a worship leader for women in Exodus and Deborah served as a judge and a prophetess. One name you may not recognize was a woman named Huldah whom King Josiah consulted instead of Jeremiah.

It is also worth noting that in Genesis 21, God told Abraham to listen to his wife, Sarah. This of course is good advice. Need I say more?

By the time of Jesus, the role of women had drastically changed. While a man's primary responsibility was seen as public, a woman's life was only to be in the home. It was only if a woman was hurting financially by lose of a husband or father that she could engage in her own small trade. Women were separated from men in many areas including public and religious life. They could go to the Temple, but could not go beyond the Women's Court that had been added years after it was completed. And women were not allowed to participate in public prayer.

Yet it was women who stayed the most loyal to Jesus when the men deserted Him. And it was the women who first found He had been raised from the dead.

Then in the rest of the passage we hear these words: He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

The second part of this passage has much for us to consider on this Sunday. First, how Jesus explained the scriptures beginning with Moses and the prophets; no doubt He reminded them of the role of suffering servant and other texts from the Hebrew Scriptures. He probably had to explain that the Messiah was a not military leader who would return Israel to their former glory. And He probably told how a new covenant was made for all by the sacrifice and resurrection of this Messiah.

Yet, all through this conversation the two did not recognize Jesus. Some commentaries have suggested that since they were walking west into the setting sun and that was the cause. It was only after their invitation to stay and the breaking of the bread that they recognized Him. It is worth noting that in Jesus' time, it was the customary thing to offer someone hospitality for the night. Travel could be dangerous after dark. The offer almost always included a meal. This the disciples do, yet Jesus took over the role of host, giving thanks and breaking the bread and that's when it happened: the disciples had their 'ah ha' moment.

Perhaps you've never heard of an 'ah ha' moment. Perhaps you call it something else. An 'ah ha' moment is defined as a moment of sudden realization, inspiration, insight, recognition, or comprehension. We've all had them, maybe we were trying to recall a name and it finally comes to us. Or maybe we have struggled trying to understand a concept and we might say the light came on. Or maybe something just happened that set us on a different path.

On that note I have to share a story from a young lady who had one of those moments.

"I was at a restaurant having lunch with some friends. I was about 25 and hadn't thought much about whether or not I'd have kids — maybe I'd want them eventually, but I definitely wasn't sure about it. When I left the table and hit the restroom, I saw a woman changing her baby's diaper. The baby was so cute, and we smiled at each other. I don't know why it was this random moment that opened my eyes and made me realize that I really did want kids someday — but I

returned to the table changed. I knew I wanted kids. I've thought of that moment a lot, especially now that I'm getting closer to starting the journey to parenthood."

Now I don't know about you, but seeing a kid getting a diaper changed did not want me to have children. But I guess we're all different.... Back to our two disciples and their moment, it was only when Jesus broke the bread did they realize it was Him. Notice how they respond, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures up to us?"

Think of that phrase for a moment. Maybe we've never experienced something quite like 'hearts burning within us' but I'm guessing we've all felt the Lord teaching and leading us at many times. Sometimes it's on Sunday morning when we hear a great sermon....Sometimes it's when we are alone and the Lord touches us.... Sometimes it's something we see or witness that makes us think someone should do something...And sometimes it's in a conversation with another....

Yet far too often we make excuses or brush it off essentially not recognizing Jesus. We can be content with the way things are. We don't allow our eyes to be opened to the possibilities before us.

These disciples immediately went back to Jerusalem. It was not really that safe or convenient to travel at that hour but they went back anyway. That is our call today, to recognize what God would have us do in the days ahead. May we, by His grace, live up to the Lord's expectations. Amen.