

## “Meet, Message, Meal and Mission”

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**Let us pray:** Beloved God, open our hearts to your healing word, our minds to your informing word and our souls to your renewing word. May we be strengthened to live out your love in word and deed. Amen

Performing the narrative as one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

“He was supposed to be the one. He was supposed to save us all. He was supposed to bring us out of oppression and in to a land of milk and honey like Moses did with the Israelites in Egypt. He was supposed to be the savior that would crush our persecutors. But he's gone! He's gone now and we're still here living life under rule of the Romans. He was so mighty and performed such miracles that I really thought he was the Messiah! I really thought he was the one prophesied to save us. I mean, he turned water in to wine, he helped a blind man be able to see, he walked on water, he even brought a man named Lazarus back to life!! He fed thousands from just a few loaves of bread and a few fish. He performed miracle after miracle and just last week we were throwing palms on to the ground celebrating his arrival in Jerusalem. He was betrayed by his own people and the chief priests and even one of his own beloved disciples had him arrested. They whipped him and beat him. They gambled for his clothes and crucified him like a common criminal. They gave him sour wine and made him suffer. Oh he suffered so much!! It is said with his last words he spoke to God asking God to forgive us because we do not know what we are doing. Then he died on that tree. He was buried in a tomb sealed by a large stone. One of our friends Mary went to the tomb and found the stone had been moved and his body was gone! She ran and told some others and Peter and John ran to the tomb and also found it empty. But now it's all over. Now we just go back to our daily lives still in fear and now in disappointment. Why did I ever believe he was the Messiah? How could I have been so foolish? The Prince of Peace? The Lamb of God? I just don't know anymore.....”

When I was asked to preach today I immediately looked up the lectionary for the week. For those who do not know, the common lectionary is a set of four scripture readings each week that match the liturgical calendar and provide a common lesson or theme that can be shared amongst Christian churches around the world. When I saw one of the scriptures was the Road to Emmaus story I thought to myself “I love this story, I remember it from Sunday school and I really like how Jesus tricks the disciples!” Well, as I really dove in to the historical and theological aspects of this story, I felt like I was in the scene from Shrek where Donkey and Shrek are talking about the onion being Shrek's personality that you have to peel away layer after layer get to the real Shrek. This story is the same. There are so many layers to this amazing story that it has become my favorite biblical story of all time!!

Now this amazing story can be broken in to four sections. I call them the four “M’s”. The disciples *Meet* Jesus, they receive a *Message* from Jesus, they had a *Meal* with Jesus and then they were on a *Mission* for Jesus. So they meet, get a message, have a meal and go on a mission.

We hear in the story of these two disciples who were sad, scared, disappointed, sullen, gloomy and resentful. Think Eeyore from Winnie The Pooh. We have the makings of a country music video. A couple guys, on a dirty road, super depressed, all you need is a guitar. Think about this - they were walking away from Jesus yet Jesus came to them. Jesus even asks them “What are you talking about?” and Cleopas (who we really don't know much about) asks “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” Didn't you check Facebook or Twitter today? He's blown away from this. Jesus asks “What things?” - Such a perfect response from the perfect teacher. Jesus asks such guiding questions and what Jesus wants to do is set these disciples free from the brokenness and despair in their heart and to introduce them to the reality of resurrection and the Kingdom of God. He does this with one simple question “What things?”

They start to tell Jesus about Jesus. The crucifixion, rumors of resurrection, the miracles, his life, his ministry but they haven't really bought in to the resurrection story yet. They haven't seen evidence or proof. The last thing in the world that they had expected is for the Messiah to suffer. They had expectations that were just were not met. They had visions and hopes of a great leader like Moses who would lead the people out of oppression and tyranny. They wanted a Messiah that would crush the Romans along with anyone else oppressing them. They were looking for someone who was mighty in word and deed just like Moses in an Exodus type story and when Jesus suffers and dies, their hopes were crushed.

In their discussion, Jesus rebukes them saying “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”. Jesus is pointing out to them how all the prophets starting with Moses foretell the Messiah who will save us all.

They were looking for a Messiah who wouldn't suffer, but of a Messiah that would come with power and dominion and authority and Jesus tells them “no!”, the stories of the Old Testament tells of a Messiah who would come and rule and reign and bring judgment and justice to the nations but also of one who would be a servant and come and die not just for Israel, but for the whole world. They were looking for a Messiah who would set them free *FROM* suffering. But Jesus was a Messiah who would set them free *BY* suffering.

The irony of this point of the story is that Jesus is telling them about all of the scriptures that talk about Jesus yet they had no idea that they were talking to Jesus. It's like a confusing and comical paradoxical Saturday Night Live skit. Jesus refers back to Moses and all of the prophets of the Old Testament as foretelling the Messiah's coming and how the Savior must suffer, die, be buried and then rise. This has sparked me to go back and reread the Old Testament. I am currently in the Lay Academy to become a Lay Preacher. A few years back I took an Old

Testament course which focused on the prophets. When I read the Old Testament I had the mindset that it was all about God and God's relationship with us. Now I am rereading the Old Testament with a new mindset revolving around Jesus and being saved by his sacrificial suffering. Like the lamb sacrificed at Passover, Jesus is that Lamb of God that saves us all.

Now as they reached Emmaus, Jesus acts as if he is going to leave the disciples and move on. Isn't that just like Jesus? Not to force himself upon you but to give you the opportunity to openly and willingly receive Jesus in to your heart. But the disciples tell this traveler who has just absolutely captivated them to stay and eat with them. It's late can be very dangerous on the road so please join us and continue to teach us. At this time, Jesus took bread and broke it and at that moment their eyes were open. This is not at all the moment that I would think their eyes would be opened. I would think it would be when Jesus was telling them about the Old Testament and the prophets or how the Messiah needed to suffer as foretold but it was when Jesus broke bread. There are two places in the gospel of Luke that Jesus broke bread. The first one is the feeding of the 5,000 and the second place is during the Last Supper and both of those give us the complete picture that Jesus was the Messiah and he had come to "give us this day our daily bread".

But think of what allowed this to happen. The disciples opened their hearts and loved this stranger enough to invite him to eat with them. By loving their neighbor, they started to open their eyes to Christ. What would have happened if those two discouraged disciples hadn't welcomed the stranger to talk and stay with them? They would have remained discouraged and probably wouldn't have been disciples for very long.

But can you imagine the excitement they must have felt? They said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" Their encounter with Jesus had been emotional. It had stirred them on the inside. It had moved their very hearts. And once moved they could not help but share. That same hour these two disciples returned to Jerusalem to tell the others what they had witnessed. By this time it was late and very dark and the road was dangerous. They ran seven miles back to Jerusalem to share this joyous news with the other disciples. If they did make the seven mile trek back to Jerusalem "In that same hour" that means they ran about an 8 minute mile!! That's pretty darn good for sandals and uneven terrain in the dark!

All who have experienced the risen Savior should be moved with similar emotions. All who have come to know Him should react the same way. We should not be able to contain it. As we heard last week in the Doubting Thomas story, Jesus tells a skeptical Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Those who believe without seeing are blessed."

Why do you suppose these two men were "kept from recognizing" Jesus for hours? The clue, I think, is when Jesus called them "foolish" and "slow of heart to believe" the Scriptures. Their outward inability to recognize Jesus mirrored their inward unbelief of what the Scriptures revealed about him. Now, Jesus fully intended to help them see.

But notice the priority of Jesus' revelation: before he opened their physical eyes, he purposed to open their hearts. Why? Because it was of utmost importance that they "walk by faith, not by sight". They had to be ready to accept and open their hearts to Jesus before Jesus could be revealed. So many times we wonder why something wasn't revealed sooner or why we didn't act sooner in our lives.

I mentioned to Debbie Katz a while back that I really wish I had entered the Lay Academy much sooner in my life when I was either in college or fresh out of college. I mean think of where I'd be if I have finished years ago! But she asked me "but do you really think you were ready? Were you at a point in your life that you think would have been as dedicated?". It made me realize that my own personal faith journey has unraveled at this exact pace and timing because God wanted me to be ready before revealing it to me. God knew I was not ready and waited until I could see and accept it for myself.

Perhaps today you are weary, sad and disappointed. You're wondering why things are the way they are. You just can't see God's purpose in the events of your life. Jesus invites us to meet with him at his table - as we break bread together, we're reminded of God's love for us; of how God could use the darkest of days to bring about the brightest of days; how violence and shame and hatred were transformed in the cross of Christ to offer hope and forgiveness and victory.

So where are you on this road? Are you walking away from Jerusalem towards Emmaus as a broken, sad, confused, scared and sullen disciple? Blinded to see and know that Jesus is with you? Are you lonely and feel abandoned? We all find ourselves walking that road so often in our daily lives. Please do not ever feel that you are alone. Know that Jesus is ALWAYS walking right there with you, every single step. Jesus is patient, forgiving and loving. Jesus is selfless and will walk with you endlessly and as soon as are ready to open your eyes and heart, Jesus will be right there to fill you with hope again!!! This is his promise to us. This is his sacrifice. When we are willing to believe and feel this then we can begin our journey back to Jerusalem like those disciples did, burning within to spread the news of Christ! Burning in their hearts to go from disciple to apostle.

God deeply longs for each one of us to walk with Jesus in close fellowship so God's plans for our lives can be fulfilled. The Emmaus disciples no doubt had walked this road many times before. Yet this day would be different, for it was the time for a life-changing encounter with their Lord. Life will never be the same again! Christ has risen from the dead! Christ is the Savior! Christ is the hope of the world! The two disciples lost no time in retracing their steps to Jerusalem to share the Good News. May that be our experience this Easter season and for the rest of our lives. The good news of Easter is not just for one day in the year; we live each day in the light of the resurrection - the knowledge that Jesus is alive; that Jesus is with us; that God is fulfilling promises, and will continue to do so. Just as Jesus met his disciples on the Emmaus road, so too will he meet you on Main Street or Delaware Avenue or whatever road you happen to be traveling on. Amen.