

Today we will not trace the whole resurrection story from start to finish. Instead we will look at an incident recorded by Luke that discusses a dining experience occurring after women discover that the tomb where Jesus was laid is empty. This will be our final stop in our Lenten series Meeting Jesus at the Table. Based on a book by Cynthia Campbell.

Our passage today takes us through the story of the Road to Emmaus. How many here have experienced an Emmaus Walk? I have to admit that I haven't had that experience, but I think I can recall times in my life when I felt just like the disciples did as they were walking down the road.

Let me tell you about a man who also felt like that. Bob Ebeling. When he woke up one morning, that morning, he had a feeling it was going to be a horrible day. The night before had been a cold one – eighteen degrees. Rare for that part of the country. The morning high was only supposed to be thirty-six degrees. Ebeling knew. He knew that these temperatures were cold enough to threaten the plans of the day. Plans that had been years in the making. Bob knew that such cold air meant this day would be horrible. Would be unless he could change their minds.

Bob called his boss that morning as dawn was breaking and told him with conviction that filled his entire body, "Sir, we have to postpone the launch". He went on to tell his boss that these frigid temperatures could have threatened the seals that were designed to keep burning fuel from leaking and potentially causing an explosion. His boss listened and asked Bob to pull together data as quickly as possible. They both knew that grounding today's launch would take a lot of convincing.

Bob spent all morning gathering every piece of evidence he could find. Anything that could convince those in charge of the looming tragedy if the launch proceeded. In spite of all the evidence gathered, politics and pressure won. The launch was still a go.

Bob and his daughter drove to his company's complex. He was frantic. He beat his fist on the dashboard and saying, "The Challenger is going to blow up". He was right. The tragedy he dreaded unfolded. It left Bob standing beside the TV screen, trembling and weeping.

Soon after that day, Bob Ebeling retired. For many years after, he was greatly depressed. I think we all would be. Howard Berkes of National Public Radio interviewed him on the 30th anniversary of the Challenger disaster. Bob told Howard about the 30 years of guilt. The thirty years of the weight of his failure to prevent that launch. He said, "I think that was one of the mistakes that God made. He shouldn't have picked me for the job." Bob went on to say that when he met God one day he would have a question for Him. "Why me? You picked a loser."

From our reading today on the Emmaus Road, I'm pretty sure those two disciples were thinking the same thing. Only a few days earlier the world was a very different place. Crowds were shouting "Hosanna" and waving palm branches. How could it go so very wrong so quickly. And they were supposed to be his companions. But they all stood alongside as it happened. They witnessed it all they failed to stop the disaster that left their friend, their teacher die in the most shameful way possible. How could they have been so idle, so ineffective in those last days. Can you hear them ask the same question as Bob, "Why?" Why would God pick such loses to call as Jesus' disciples?

They walk that long, seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus and away from their life of hope and revolution. Now it was back to their old ways. Catching fish and living quietly under Roman rule. But while they are walking, another traveler joined them. He asked "What are you two discussing?" This was a question that stopped the two of them in their tracks. "What things?" they asked? Had this guy been living under a rock? "The things about Jesus of Nazareth!" they said.

Evening was upon them and the weary disciples arrived at their place of lodging for the night. They encouraged their strange travel companion to join them. He did. He sat at the table with his despairing friends who as yet did not recognize him. But then he took bread and blessed it and broke it. That's when their eyes were opened. That's when they saw him. That's when they saw Jesus. And at that same moment, Jesus vanished. But they saw what they saw and were overcome! Even though they'd just finished that day long journey to Emmaus, they couldn't help it. They had to run back to Jerusalem, find the disciples and tell them "Jesus is risen" (Jesus is risen, indeed!)

After his 2016 interview on NPR, Bob's words struck a chord. Before too long letters started pouring in. They filled the mailbox of this 89-year-old man in declining health. The letters contained assurances that God had NOT made a mistake in place Ebeling at his position with NASA.

One letter read. "God didn't pick a loser. He picked Bob Ebeling, a man of integrity who did his job that day."

Letter after letter. Letters of encouragement, letters of compassion. Letters pleading with someone they only knew through the radio to let go of this burden that he carried. Two engineers who were there that day contacted him. The same engineers who yielded to political pressure and signed off on the Challenger's launch. They told him that the Challenger was not his burden to bear. Even NASA contacted him and told him the Challenger was a constant reminder to the agency to remain vigilant and to listen to people just like him – people who have the courage to speak up."

Three months after Bob's initial interview on NPR, he passed away. His family said those last three months were like a new life had been offered to him. The kindness and compassions he received through the letters and comments helped him see that pivotal day differently. In an interview just before his death he said, "You helped bring my worrisome mind to ease."

If we're being honest, resurrection can be hard to wrap our minds around. It can be a great stumbling block for people of conviction, who long for the community, thoughtfulness, and activism of a church. But they don't know what to make of this metaphysical mystery that is central to the Christian faith. If you're one of those, you're in good company. Even Jesus' disciples, who heard him talk constantly about his death and resurrection found this concept absurd.

They were slow to believe. They called the women from the tomb delirious in their talk of resurrection. Even after touching the wounds of the risen Christ, they struggled to believe.

But the table. There's just something about the table. Something happens there that allows the resurrection to sink in. It is that table that finally allows what was dismissed as an idle tale to be something worth sprinting home about.

In the upper room on the night before his arrest, Jesus said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, without speaking a single word, he took bread after that long Emmaus journey and broke it. And guess what? They remembered! They remembered everything! All they'd been taught. All they'd been told would happen. They remembered who they were as disciples of the risen one, and they took off to share that good news to anyone who would listen.

Resurrection is a power that invites us to remember. To remember what we know, what we've been taught. Resurrection is something we can see and know in this world. Think about a family that stays up all night after a death, keeping memories alive as they share stories and laugh at old jokes. Resurrection is the power behind social movements and activism and protest. It's where people name and claim that injustice and oppression and death will not have the final word. Because life truly does exist just on the other side.

Resurrection is the power of remembering, perhaps after decades of denial, that you have belovedness. You have belovedness. The same way that Resurrection was the power that allowed an 89-year-old man to have years of guilt and worry lifted in the last months of his life.

When the disciples recognized the risen Christ at the table, they remembered what they already knew: death didn't have the final word, and they ran to share the good news. The good news that still today is a movement of God's people to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God in this world.

Church family, we are witnesses today of this movement. So let's break bread, let's extend hospitality, let's share the good news that Light does over come darkness and that hope will sustain us through our struggles. Church family, let us live as resurrection people! You are resurrection people. We are resurrection people. Say it with me, "We are resurrection people". We are resurrection people of hope, compassion, justice, and above all. LOVE!

Let's pray.