

No you didn't read the calendar wrong, today isn't Easter. Today's scripture reading is indeed one we typically hear a week or so after Easter. Who thinks I preached on this for our Easter message? You are correct. But this was also the scripture that our DS Timote intended to preach on. So when in Rome. And if you're wondering why we're preaching on this again, I have a very church calendar year answer for you. The period between Pentecost and Advent is called Ordinary Time. During Ordinary Time, we focus on living out the teachings of Christ and his ministry in our everyday lives and not on specific events like Jesus birth or resurrection. The term "ordinary" comes from the word "ordinal," meaning counted or numbered, as each week is designated by a number. This week is the 14<sup>th</sup> week after Pentecost or Proper 19. The liturgical color for this season is green, symbolizing growth and new life.

Ordinary time is also the longest season of the church. The longest journey. So today as we look at the Road to Emmaus story, consider that we are revisiting the journey of Jesus again. Today we won't focus so much on the aspects of the resurrection itself, but more on the actions of the two disciples and Jesus. Here ends the seminary worship lecture.

One aspect of our look at today's encounter is the idea of invitation. It made me think about what it might look like if you were told to invite someone to join us for church. Something like this.

**Show Video**

More about invitation in a moment.

Today's passage starts by introducing us to followers of Jesus. 2 of them. One is named Cleopas, and the other is unnamed. Consider the unnamed one to be anyone and I mean ANYONE who wants to be a follower of Jesus. These 2 are not explicitly named as one of the 12 disciples, just followers. Luke does want us to know how close these two were to the 12. It would appear that these two had been in the know about the events that took place at the tomb. But again some vagueness about how directly as we will see here in a moment.

They are leaving Jerusalem, which presents another interesting puzzle or tie to other accounts. Historically, when we hear stories of anyone COMING to Jerusalem it is with an air of joy and celebration. Let's look at a few examples. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem by Jesus. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel we have King David exuberantly bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (and showing his kingly jewels. But that's a story for another day).

Jerusalem had significant symbolism to support a joyous entry. Jerusalem was on a higher elevation. Who hasn't been confused when the Bible says that Jesus went down to Galilee when it is clearly to the north. That tricky higher elevation.

Going to Jerusalem literally meant a journey towards closeness with God. This is why Jews were required to go to one pilgrimage festival each year. 2 of these festivals you are familiar with, Passover and Pentecost. The one in the fall is called Succoth or Festival of Booths and it celebrated the harvest. It was a "camp out" type of festival, which made it very popular.

Finally Jerusalem has always been significant in the messianic prophecy. The establishment of God's kingdom in Jerusalem or Zion is a crucial part of many prophetic stories.

Counter this with stories about leaving Jerusalem. These are usually stories filled with heartache. They typically represent a rejection of traditional faith. A shift in spiritual purpose. A note of God's judgement. A move to a new and more expansive covenant.

From the Old Testament, the obvious connection is that of the people of Judah being led away to Babylon. This was a spiritual displacement. It was a collective trauma for Israel. In a deeper sense, these moments were not just a symbolism of a death, but a resurrection. A symbol of a return to faithfulness. A journey away from Jerusalem symbolized exile, repentance, and return.

In our passage today, our followers of Jesus are clearly in a state of rejection. They are in the midst of a shift in spiritual purpose. They are on the move to a new and more expansive covenant.

This comes in a most mysterious way. A stranger comes along side of them. We get the hint. We know who this stranger is. But they do not. So play along for a moment if you would.

This “stranger” comes along and ask a seemingly innocent question. “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They look at this stranger, almost as if offended. We are then introduced to Cleopas who has the courage to respond. “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

The stranger...aka...Jesus has the audacity to ask another question. “What things?” . Um..hello captain obvious. But we also see their emotions in this exchange. Yes they are sad. They launch a whole explanation into those “things”.

Things about Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But they had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of their group astounded them. The women were at the tomb early this very morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us all that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he (Jesus) was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

They had hopes, they were astounded. But they didn’t see so they didn’t believe it. Note that in Luke’s account, the Emmaus Road is the first time anyone encounters the risen Christ.

This stranger, aka Jesus. (How did he keep his cool?) Moves into a sermon theme that will be repeated over and over again. From the likes of Peter and Paul in the book of Acts. Jesus will lead them through scripture. He will go back to the beginning. He will begin with Moses. He will move on to the story of David, perhaps quoting some of the very things to be quoted by his apostles later. Like Psalm 110 which says. ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’ Proof that when David spoke of resurrection he was

not speaking of himself. From the prophet Habakkuk who would say, ‘Look, you scoffers! Be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you.’ This stranger will be hauntingly familiar with scripture, and yet would these followers of Jesus see?

It is getting dark. There is more road ahead, for the Road to Emmaus continues on to Joppa on the sea. Btw, we don’t really know if Emmaus was the stop here. We just know that this is the road to Emmaus.

But fun fact aside, back to the story. These followers of Jesus offer an invitation. They invite this follower to stay with them. And they unknowingly invite Christ into their midst. What does Jesus do? He accepts this invitation. He has a wide-open opportunity and he takes it. He enters into their midst. He sits down with them for a meal. He takes the initiative. Picks up the bread that is set on the table. Lifts it up. Prays. Breaks the bread.

Light shines in the darkness. Jesus is revealed. All who sit at the table know. They know beyond a shadow of a doubt. Christ is with us, in the flesh. Then a deeper realization sinks in. Christ has been with us all along. All along this journey. Stayed with us the entire time.

At that moment Jesus disappears. Gone. They are again alone. Yet they know. They know beyond a shadow of a doubt. These promises are real. They are real for us too.

Jesus will come alongside us in our times of grief. Jesus will prompt us with question to try to get us there on our own. Jesus will always welcome an invitation from us. Jesus will always accept an invitation from us.

Jesus wants us to speak to him about what’s on our hearts. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Jesus can handle it. He’s handled much worse.

We've all traveled rough roads before. Some of us may be traveling them now. I know some of you are traveling them now. Some will surely travel them in the future. We are in a marathon of life. So consider this. The road to Emmaus was 7 miles long. A distance then, today a much shorter journey. Like our followers today, we may find ourselves on a sad journey of grief for any reason. When we are on that road, as Jesus was, we may need to be intentional about getting off that road. But when we do get off that road, we also need to invite Jesus to join us.

When we intentionally invite Jesus, what does that mean? Speaking to him through prayer. Reading scriptures. Allowing a trusted friend to join in the journey. It is not meant to be a journey of aloneness.

Jesus never leaves us or forsakes us. EVER. Jesus always wants us to invite him into our lives. Jesus wants to walk as closely as possible through things like prayer, scripture, and close friends. Jesus walks along side all of us. Both named and unnamed, we are loved. Sing Jesus loves you.

Let us pray.