

“Renewed Faith”  
Acts 2:36-41; 1 Peter 1:17-23;  
Luke 24:13-35

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Those disciples were on a journey to Emmaus. We often take journeys. They seemed to be taking this journey because they were disappointed. They were uncertain about what was happening. We don't know exactly why they were going to Emmaus. It doesn't tell us. Maybe they were going home. They had been disciples of Jesus, following him around, and now maybe they were just going home thinking it was over. Jesus had died. They were sad on their journey. It was a rough journey for them.

I think about that. We all have those moments in our lives where we have a rough journey. I'm a little hesitant to use this example, but as I was coming home last night, first I couldn't get the plane I was supposed to out of Omaha. I had to find a different flight. It felt like a rough journey right there. For a moment I thought I had lost my ID and started panicking a little bit. And then on the plane out of Minneapolis—you know when I'm on a rough road bouncing around, I don't think I'm gonna die, but sometimes in a plane when it's rough, after a half-hour or so bouncing around it's hard not to think about whether at tens of thousands of feet... Well, you get the point. That's a simple perspective on a rough journey.

We all have those moments in our lives of a rough journey where we wonder what's going to happen next. It's often a much stronger, deeper, harder journey than a rough airplane ride. That's what these guys were experiencing. They had lost the person most important to them in their lives; the person who they thought was going to redeem Israel. Talk about a rough journey.

I guess they are doing what is common. When you are going through a rough journey, what do you do? Oftentimes, we go to someplace familiar. We look back to where we can find solace. So maybe they were going home to a place where they could find some peace again. Maybe they were afraid to stay in Jerusalem with the rest of the disciples. We don't know exactly what it was, but it was a rough journey and they were struggling.

It's interesting what happens as they go along on their journey, because they felt like God had abandoned them. They had thought Israel was going to be redeemed, but not now. So they are on this walk, filled with disappointment, and sadness, and grief. And this fellow comes up and asks what's going on. They respond to him with incredulity. “Do you not know? Are you the only one around here who doesn't know what's going on?” So they tell him what's been happening.

I want to stop there and notice what happens. Jesus comes into the lives of these disciples, and what's the first thing he does? He asks them a question. He listens to them. It made me think maybe there's something I can learn from that, because often my tendency is to come in and begin to tell how it is, particularly if I think I know already.

And who knows better than Jesus does? But he listens. He tells them he cares about who they are and what's happening to them by listening to them. He takes their incredulity and then he gives it back. "Aren't you kind of foolish? Don't you know that the Messiah had to do these things?" He goes on, then to tell them and probably at that point they were more willing to listen because he had listened to them. Now he's beginning to talk to them, guide them through the scriptures.

The interesting thing about this is that as they finish up this time with Jesus, they recognize him, finally, in the breaking of the bread. Of course, there's a lot in that, isn't there? Next week we will have communion, when we always remember and we have that sense that we recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Then as they talk about that encounter, it's very interesting to me that they don't say, "Think about how well he was able to talk about all the scripture. His exposition was great! It was fantastic! Now we know." That's not what they say. It makes me think about all the times that I've thought that if I could just give the best argument, it will be what's needed. What do they say? They say, "Our hearts burned within us." They experienced the presence of God. They recognized that they had been with Jesus when they looked back and noticed. And it was in their experience of their feelings that it happened. I'm sure the exposition was great. It says so. He was able to explain all the scripture, but it wasn't just that. It was when their hearts burned.

Does that mean that whenever our hearts burn, that Jesus must be present? I would like to be a little bit careful with that because sometimes I can have pretty great feelings when I think somebody is agreeing with me. These guys had been with Jesus. They knew about him. They knew what he was about. They had opened their lives to what God was doing so when they encountered him again they had that openness and experience. It is that combination of things, their ability to both listen to him and recognize their experience, to hear him and in the process he begins to reconstruct their faith.

You see, they had experienced a bunch of things they didn't understand. They were full of wonder at why it had all failed. There are times in our lives when we just don't see how it works. But they had allowed Jesus to come in and walk with them and through that he begins to reconstruct their faith and rebuild their hope.

It is in moments of disappointment, of struggle that it is so hard to hold on to the trust we might have in God. It's so hard to hold on to that hope, but it's exactly in those times, as we open up again and allow Christ to walk with us we allow ourselves to be redirected.

What's one of the first things they did after their experience with Jesus? They ran back to be with the disciples. They had left their community in their grief, but in recognizing Jesus coming into their lives they realized the place to go was back into their community. As he rebuilds their faith, as he reconstructs their hope, they know the place to be is with their community.

That's what I think resurrection is about. It reconstructs our faith and renews our hope and leads us again into worship and into grace. It enables us to notice that whatever else is going on in the world, God is still with us. God is present. Christ has risen, and out of that begins to lead us into life.

I think Peter is looking back on this and recognizing how God has worked through Christ to lead him into life, and into everlasting life. What that does in the moment is lead him to genuine mutual love. It is that recognition of God's presence with us going through the hardest things in our lives that then enables us to have that genuine mutual love. We share the hardships. We share the joys. We recognize we are called to be in community because we have a God that continues to walk with us and build our faith, renew our hope, and enable our life.

In some ways, we all take walks to Emmaus and Jesus comes with us, and as we open up and allow him in our faith will be rebuilt, our hope renewed, and our ability to live into that genuine mutual love will again occur.

I don't know where you are on your walk. Maybe you're on a walk to Emmaus. Maybe you're on a walk back to the community. Maybe you are in the community and rejoicing, and that is wonderful, for we can rejoice because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.