

Walking with Our Savior
Acts 2:14, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19;
1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

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On the Road Again is the song that comes to mind as I think about these disciples walking to Emmaus. There are a lot of different reasons why people get on the road again. Sometimes it's because of work. People travel to work. Helen and I will be traveling so we can be with our daughter at the birth of her child, our first grandchild.

These disciples weren't really going *to* something as much as they were leaving something behind. Or perhaps it was a little of both. They were trying to leave behind the experience they had just had—the grieving, the uncertainty, the disappointment—and were headed back home, perhaps, to try to return to what had been a normal life. I wonder if they were hoping they could move past the disappointments and uncertainty.

In fact, they couldn't stop wondering as they were taking this journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were doing that wondering together. They were talking with one another. They were probably thinking back over the good times: the amazing teachings they had heard, the hopes they had had. And then, probably reexperiencing some of the grief at what had happened, feeling like it was futile, that all their hopes and dreams had been dashed. Now they were walking home, wondering what this all meant and what to do with the teaching they had heard.

As they were walking in this way—the ups and downs, remembering the good, grieving the loss—they didn't recognize Jesus as he came alongside them. He came alongside them and asked them what was on their minds. I really wonder, as I think about what was happening with these disciples, if this isn't something similar to the way that we often react to our lives. We find ourselves on this kind of journey at various times in our lives, particularly now, in this time when we're trying to understand what has happened, why the world has been turned upside down by some little virus. There are times when things seem normal, and other times when fear and uncertainty can enter in. There are times when we get tired of the way we are expected to live in these days, wondering if we can't just return to normal. And perhaps we, too, miss Jesus walking with us.

When I have struggles like this, I feel the need to have conversation, to get together with someone who can hear me out. Maybe that's what these disciples are doing for each other as they walk along the road. They are hearing each other out, trying to figure out what's going on. Then Jesus comes along and walks beside them, unrecognized. I wonder how often, as we are trying to work through our experience of life, Jesus is walking along with us, unrecognized, inviting us to tell him what's on our

minds, allowing him to receive that uncertainty that we are experiencing, the struggles and the needs we have.

I wonder if, amidst the uncertainty and concerns, we can begin to listen for the ways God might be speaking into our lives as Jesus was speaking into the lives of these disciples. We may not recognize how Jesus is walking alongside us, or the Spirit is working among us, but I think we are invited to open our ears and listen. In the midst of our own struggles, sometimes it's hard to not just focus on our concerns, and so, find it hard to listen and to hear how God might actually be speaking into our lives even in those moments. In some ways, this road to Emmaus journey these disciples are on, and Jesus coming alongside, is one description of our struggle with the life of faith.

Peter is doing the same thing in the sermon he's giving in Acts. He's just describing it a little differently. He says, "You live in a corrupt generation." He's setting up this description of something that's wrong and inviting them to something that is right, to goodness. When he says, "this corrupt generation," he's talking about a time. Maybe he's talking about the way people are living in this time, as well. Particularly in a time when the word *corrupt* has a sense of being twisted and parched. Think about the dryness when life is not well watered. Think about what happens to plants when they are parched and begin to wither, or when something is twisted and you can't find your way. He's describing a time in one's life when the good seems very far away. In fact, life might begin to feel futile, as in 1 Peter where we hear "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors."

I wonder if those disciples, as they were leaving Jerusalem, were wondering if what they had done had been futile. Wondering if in some ways it was in vain, unreal, ineffectual, unproductive, and now they had to go find something else. They had to go back to the way they had been living or try to return to some other normal. So we see this tension that is built. Peter is saying this is a corrupt generation. This is a time when the good seems so far away, a time when things seem futile. As he's saying that, he's setting up that tension.

The disciples who were walking to Emmaus thought Jesus was gone, no longer around to lead them out of that corruptness, out of the twistedness, out of the parched places. On the contrary, Peter is going to say that Jesus is the way out in both Acts and 1 Peter. He will say that Jesus is the glory of God.

Now, there's an interesting thing about the word "glory." I always had a bit of a hard time relating to that word because it always seems like the angels singing at Jesus' birth, showing the glory of God in that way. Some bright, astounding, fantastic kind of thing. And it's probably appropriate that glory has light associated with it because light reveals. It chases the darkness away. When you have light, you can see in a way you couldn't see before. That's really what glory seems to mean. As I was looking it up, it

really means “that which evokes a positive assessment.” It reveals what is genuinely good, what is real in creation. It reveals what is actual, what is true, what is real, what is valuable.

Peter is going to talk about Jesus as the glory of God because he’s talking about the revealing of God’s goodness, of God’s grace, of God’s love. As Jesus came and walked with those disciples, there was an invitation to see that God had truly been at work across history, through the scriptures, through the prophets. As Jesus helps them to see scripture in a new way, Jesus opens their eyes to his presence, which then comes to fruition in the breaking of the bread. They, at that moment, realized their true sustenance was found in the one they had walked with, the one that had been crucified, suffered and died, and now was alive and inviting them to recognize that he was the way for their lives, the way to new life. Indeed, the moment they recognized Jesus, they turned around and ran back to Jerusalem to describe what had happened to them.

It’s interesting to me that when Peter is giving his sermon, he invites them to be saved. Now, it says, “save yourselves.” I don’t think that’s the best translation. “Be saved,” says Peter. How does he expect people to be saved? By hearing about Jesus. By recognizing that Jesus has come. It’s the same thing that is happening to those who were walking to Emmaus. They recognized Jesus as giving them new life. He’s inviting them to be saved. Recognizing Jesus gives us new life. Recognizing Jesus brings the very grace and love of God into our lives.

What is the action that Peter is asking the people to do to be saved? He’s asking them to repent, to turn around. Having heard that, having recognized some grace in our lives, some way in which God has entered in, some way Jesus has been walking with us or speaking to us or engaging us, we turn around. Turn toward him. Turn toward what that leads us to. It is in that turning around that we can receive that forgiveness. We can receive and be released from the burden of our mistakes and wrong directions.

It feels that the fellows walking to Emmaus were going the wrong direction. They were taking the wrong path. Staying with the disciples was the best way. That’s the description of sin—going off in the wrong direction. Turning around, recognizing Jesus’ forgiveness, they were released, they were returned to the community, to faith.

In First Peter, it’s put as being born anew. It’s the idea that as we turn around, we receive the forgiveness. In Jesus, we recognize God’s glory, goodness and love. Jesus invokes the realization that what really matters, what is really the central part of our lives, is that we are loved by a God that invites us into a way, into a path, into a relationship that comes out in the way we live.

Indeed, in First Peter, having had the time to look back and to see how it’s changed them, there a description of how you have purified your souls through obedience to this

reality, this truth, this sense that God is with us, that Jesus has shown us the way, and that we are forgiven. This is what is really real, actual, genuine, and invites us into the goodness. In doing that, First Peter suggests that we will have genuine mutual love, to love one another deeply from the heart.

There are two different words for love used here. One is phileo, and one is agape. I think he's talking about both of these. One is the idea of becoming companions, of becoming sisters and brothers. We share together in that kind of relationship. Phileo is a mutual affection and a caring for each other and a certain sense of loyalty to one another, a commitment to each other simply because we are family. We are all God's children.

Agape takes it a little further and invites us to recognize that not only are we in those relationships with each other, but each one is valued by God. Agape means to value and to see the worth of the other such that we want to make sure that we care for them, that we know that they deserve to have their needs met, that we all can become the human beings that God wants us to become. And so, it is a deep recognition of the value of each other that leads to attending to and acting toward the good for each other.

In the moments in John when Jesus is preparing to leave, he says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you." In Matthew 25, verse 40, he says, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." In First Peter, it's written, as we are engaged with the reality of Christ, the truth of who he is, "we will have genuine mutual love, a love for one another that is deep and from the heart."

So, while we are on these journeys when we struggle with events that are happening, I do believe that Jesus comes alongside us and invites us, gives us moments when our eyes are opened and we recognize that our sustenance is from God, is God. He invites us to turn in to the forgiveness God gives us, in to the grace God gives us, and become those who return to each other, to the community of faith and to faith itself and find in doing so that we grow into the love God has given us. It begins to exhibit in our lives, as well: that deep, mutual, genuine love. Loving one another deeply from our hearts. Amen.