

Jesus Came Over for Supper

Luke 24:13-43

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.

18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your

minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"

42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

On Tuesday of this past week, I got a haircut.

Now I don't expect that to mean very much to you. However, the conversation that followed my haircut, after my barber set down his clippers, that had a lot to do with the sermon you're going to hear today.

Imagine that, a preacher and a barber, talking!

What struck us both that afternoon was the front page of the Wayne Independent - sitting out on the table with the other papers and magazines my barber leaves for his customers to read. It wasn't one particular headline that sparked our debate, but rather the great contrast, you could even call it conflict, between the first three headlines.

In case you missed it, I brought a copy in with me. Tuesday, April 1st. But this is no joke.

The first headline reads, "Schools, banks and restaurants offer aid to Ericksons."

This is a story about how businesses in our community are reaching out to help the family of 11-yr. old Adam Erickson, who died tragically in a fire at his home.

The next headline read, "Fire chief: Smoke alarms save lives."

This story describes how last Sunday morning, a family in Oregon township was able to safely escape from a fire, thanks to the early warning provided by their smoke alarms. While the family's home experienced extensive damage from fire, heat, and smoke, everyone got out without injury.

And, finally, the third headline down reads like this, "Creation seminar asks: Random chance or intelligent design?"

This article talks about a seminar held last weekend at the Honesdale High school which presented information on Creationism. Creationism is a way of understanding how our world came into being, how we, and all life, got to where we are today. The primary source and reference for Creationists is the opening chapters of the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

Interviewing one local mother who attended the seminar, the article quotes her as saying, "Everything, from nature to our children, points to the hand of God...There has to be a designer," she said. "This all didn't just happen."¹

With the whole of that front page spread out before us, those words struck both my barber and me with great force. It left us wondering.

If all creation is part of God's plan, then what were the fires? And if the answers to how and why God made things work like they do, are so clear, as some might claim them to be, as easy as reading the opening chapters of Genesis, then why did the headlines of the April 1st edition leave us so confused? So full of questions? So full of doubt? So longing for a more complete, a more satisfying answer?

I found myself wondering again on Saturday.

Yesterday, here in our sanctuary, Pastor MaryJo Cliff and I jointly officiated the wedding ceremony of Donald Stiles and Michelle Bonham. It was a wonderful service, and the church was packed. The bride cried through most of it, but it was clear to all that they were only tears of joy.

¹ The Wayne Independent. Vol. 130, Num. 65, pg. 1

Just before the service began, I spoke with Doris Rosener, who told me that this was the second church service she'd been to that day. Doris came to the wedding directly from the funeral service for her cousin held at the Aldenville Baptist Church.

I have never had to attend, much less officiate, a funeral in the morning and a wedding in the afternoon. And I hope I never have to.

But that's the kind of world we live in, isn't it? We know all too well how the same day can bring both tears and laughter, both joy and sorrow, both clouds and sunshine – and that we can never know how far we are from a change in the weather, until it breaks upon us.

I wish I could tell you why.

The little assurance I can offer you today, however, is this - we are not the first of Jesus disciples that life has left feeling more than a bit confused. About what God is doing, about what God is up to, about the part we're supposed to play in it, about how it's all going to unfold around us.

And as evidence, I offer you our scripture reading, this narrative often titled, 'the walk to Emmaus.'

Notice that Luke places this account right on the heels of Easter morning, it follows directly after the women's report that Jesus is no longer in his tomb. Just like that terrifying, that electrifying experience, this story also leaves Jesus' disciples breathless, in shock, all tangled up with both elation and fear.

This time it involves two of Jesus disciples, Cleopas, who we've never heard of before

and who the Bible never mentions again, and some other guy. For a reason we're not given, they've chosen to take a walk on Easter day, a seven mile hike from the city of Jerusalem to town of Emmaus.

As they're strolling along, trying to make sense of all that's happened to them in the past week – from Jesus' palm branch parade to his death on the cross, who should come up to them but Jesus himself.

You'd think it'd be a climactic moment – Jesus, just back from the dead, standing there in broad daylight, in the middle of the pavement – you'd expect the disciples to start cheering, to immediately pull out their cell phones and call everyone they know, to call the papers and the TV stations – Jesus is back. He's here!

But they don't.

Instead – they don't even recognize him! You can almost hear them, one casually leaning over to the other, whispering, “Dude. Who's that guy behind us? Is he following us? I'm gonna start walking a little faster, you watch to see if he speeds up too, right?”

Not only do they not recognize Jesus when they see him, they remain clueless even after Jesus starts talking to them. About himself. All the way into Emmaus. All the way into the restaurant. Even while they're waiting for their table.

Not until they're seated, not until after the waitress brings them their drinks and their basket of dinner rolls, not until after Jesus takes the bread, and blesses it, and breaks it – just like he did with his disciples in that upper room, just three days ago – do they finally realize who is with them. That this is Jesus. Duh!

And then, when their A-ha! moment finally comes, the moment all their doubts and fears and misgivings about Jesus can be forever, totally, unmistakably swept away, what happens!

Jesus vanishes. Jesus leaves them holding the check.

So just like the women who came running back from the cemetery in the early morning light, so now these two high-tail it back to the only people they know who will grant them and their story even the slightest chance at being heard and believed.

Cleopas and the other guy find the eleven, in a house with Jesus' other disciples, and despite the fact that they've just traveled 14 miles in a day, you bet they are ready to spill their amazing tale, their momentous news, to the others the very moment the door closes behind them.

Only they don't get to.

Why? Because even before they can take a breath, their friends and companions are telling them that, "Guess what! You'll never believe it! Jesus is alive! He has risen! Peter saw him!"

Now I ask you, how much more confused, how much more full of questions, can we possibly be, than was this huddled, exhausted, bewildered, surprised, room full of Christians found here in the Gospel of Luke?

The Bible doesn't say, but I'd guess that once they'd all caught their breath, all of Jesus' disciples spent the next few hours just swapping stories, and posing theories, and generally shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders as together they struggled to answer the question, "What do we do? Where do we go from here?"

I imagine they're not any less surprised when Jesus himself appears, and stands among them. "Peace be with you." he says. Which is as good a blessing, and as needed a gift as you can offer folks trying to wrap their minds around such difficult circumstances, such confusing events, such contradictory headlines.

In the midst of this journey in which we walk together, fraught with mystery and conflict and debate and doubt - "Peace be with you." Jesus says. To be surprised by Jesus' presence in our midst, to be caught off guard by Jesus' peace. How good that sounds to me.

The Easter headline reads, "He is Risen!" And there's no other story like it. But that story, in which each one of us lives out our day is anything but short or neat or easy to follow. On the contrary, it is full of surprises, full of seeming contradictions, full of mysteries too deep for the mind of man to comprehend.

Still, we in faith proclaim, "He is Risen." That means that not only is Jesus alive again. It means that Jesus is alive and he is out there, out on the road, waiting for you in places you least expect to find him. It means that Jesus will find you.

In a world of confusion and fear, Jesus is present, with peace, for you. May he give us eyes to see him.

To the glory of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

