

Did That Just Happen: The Walk to Emmaus

May 1, 2022

This week we begin our new series, *Did That Just Happen? He Is Risen, Indeed!* We are midst of the Easter Season, which takes us all the way into June. For the next several weeks we will be looking at what happened in the weeks immediately after Jesus' Resurrection. The physical Resurrection itself can be one of the hardest things for people to accept. This was just as true for the disciples as anyone. They just weren't expecting it. That is why the resurrection appearances are so important, for them as well as us. The gospels are very specific. This is no mere figurative or spiritual appearances. This is no, "he'll always be with us, in our mind, in our memory," kind of way like we might say about a loved one when they die. The Apostles are very clear. The physical person of Jesus rose that Sunday morning.

Over the coming weeks we will hear eyewitness accounts of several people who *saw* the resurrected Jesus in the flesh. They are always astounded because even *they* did not expect it. They are left with the feeling "Did that just happen? Yes, He is risen, He is risen, indeed!"

This week, we are going for a long walk with a couple of disciples. They are not a part of the Twelve, but they have still been deeply affected by the execution of their leader, their Messiah, Jesus. It is still Sunday, they have heard about the incident at the tomb and everything that the women there had experienced. The men dismissed their report as delirious babblings, not possible.

A couple of the disciples decide that they need to get out of town, and they head for a place not too far away, Emmaus. Our Scripture Passage comes from Luke 24:13-36. Hear the word of the Lord.

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 the only one visiting Jerusalem who does 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 they did not see Jesus."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah 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 continued on 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.

The word of life.

Thanks be to God.

After all my time in the South, when I hear about Cleopas and his friend, I want to say, "Blessed their hearts." Can you imagine walking and talking with Jesus for seven miles without realizing who it is? How you would feel when you realized who you've been with this whole time? No wonder they had the energy to race back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. They were running on adrenaline.

On the other hand, maybe you have walked with Jesus and weren't aware of it. The Book of Hebrews advises in chapter 13:2, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." The writer easily could have been referring to Emmaus as well as when Abraham hosted three angels in Genesis chapter 18, one of whom was later revealed to be God.

Of course, these disciples have an advantage that we don't have. They have been in the physical presence of Jesus before, and yet they still didn't recognize him. Neither did Mary Magdalene at the tomb. It could be that his physical appearance was different in some way. The Scripture says that "they were kept from recognizing him." (Luke 24:16) Does that mean that Jesus was trying to trick them? Or perhaps, they simply could not accept the possibility. They had already dismissed the women's report as delirious babblings. Their own preconceptions kept them from recognizing him. It wasn't until he opened the Scriptures to them, and they experienced the familiar practice of Jesus breaking the bread, that they realized. Their eyes were opened. The Greek word for "opened" is the word used in birth (Luke 2:23) or the first time a child opens their eyes. It is as if they are seeing reality as it truly exists for the first time in their entire lives. And, there before them is Jesus.

In the ancient Greek myth *The Odyssey* we have the epic story of Odysseus. He was a valiant warrior who fought bravely in the Trojan War. But, according to legend, his journey home after that war was side tracked for many years as the gods tested Odysseus through a series of trials. His journeys carried him far and wide as he encountered mythic beasts and lands, many of which are still a part of our language: the Cyclops, Scylla and Charybdis, the sirens' voices.

Meanwhile, back at his home, Odysseus' wife and family presume he must have died on the way back from Troy. Finally, however, the day came when the gods released Odysseus, and he arrives back home at last. But instead of simply waltzing through the front door and crying out some Greek equivalent of, "Hi Honey, I'm home!" Odysseus decides that he wants to find out if anything has changed during his long absence. Did his wife still love him? Had she been faithful? In order to find out, Odysseus disguises himself approaching his home looking like a stranger in need of a place to stay.

The housekeeper welcomes the apparent traveler and performs for him the then-standard practice of foot-washing. As she does this, she entertains the stranger with stories about her long-lost master, Odysseus, whom she had also served as a nurse when he was young. She told the traveler about how long her master has been missing, and she noted that by then Odysseus would be about the same age and of about the same build as the man whose feet she was washing. Now when Odysseus had been a young boy, he was gored by a wild boar, leaving a nasty scar on his leg. As she went about her task, suddenly her hand brushed against that old scar and instantly her eyes were opened and she recognized her beloved friend and master, with great joy!

Can you think of a time when something happened, and suddenly you looked at the world, at life, in a whole new way? For some it is the birth of their first child. It's as if in that moment everything changed. Or perhaps, you finally recognized something that had been in front of you the whole time. Of course, when we realize our own truth about Jesus, who he is, and everything

that he has done of us, it is the same. Over time, we can forget the excitement we felt when our eyes were first opened, but think of how amazing it is to come to this realization.

I love the phrasing here describing what the Emmaus trio talked about on the trip. "[Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (vs. 27) In other words ... the Word of God (Jesus) used the word of God (The Bible) to testify about himself.

The Scriptures are very important to Jesus. If they are important to Jesus, they should be important to us. Sadly, a lot of people dismiss them or ignore them, even people who claim the name of Christian or follower of Jesus. They may have a Bible, but it sits on a shelf getting dusty. There are lots of understandable reasons to do this, but you shouldn't.

One of the problems is the way that some use Scripture to manipulate people, lifting verses out of context to support their agenda, whatever that may be. When you see that, you might think, "What's the point?" You might not even realize that they *are* manipulating it and think that the Bible really means those things. Even before I was a Christian, I would sometimes look up what people referenced. I realized then that if you lift verses out of context, you could justify almost any action or behavior, good or bad. Sometimes, those verses, those stories were to tell us what *not* to do, we just never got to the part where we saw the consequences. *Well, Moses did it, David did it. Elijah did it. Peter or Paul did it, so it must be okay.* Not always. We need to hear the rest of the story.

There can be the seeming inconsistency in some places, especially when you are looking at the surface and not considering the time, place, and/or purpose for which the author is writing. A great example is women leading and teaching in the church. In 1 Timothy chapter 2, the Apostle Paul *seems* to say that he would not permit a woman to teach (vs 12), but in other writings, Paul specifically refers to women being teachers and leaders in *his* churches, such as Priscilla (Rom 16:3-5) a leading teacher, Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2) an emissary for Paul to Rome, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3) leaders in the Church of Philippi, just as a start. In Galatians 3:28 Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

So, Paul's own *practice* doesn't seem to correspond with the verse in 1 Timothy. Inconsistent? It can seem that way, but we have to remember that we are looking a personal letter to Timothy, the pastor of the Church in Ephesus. There were things going on there including false teaching spreading through the church. Then, there is an unfortunate traditional translation of a Greek word as "woman" where everywhere else in the New Testament this same word is translated as "wife." So, Paul is addressing a very specific situation in a very specific circumstance, *and* we have a questionable word. The problem is not that there is an inconsistency. It is that this verse has

been lifted out of that context and used as a generalization to dismiss all of this other information.

The way to get the benefit of hearing directly from God, avoid the manipulation of Scripture by others (or even unintentional misinterpretation), and see how the seeming inconsistencies are not really inconsistent is by engaging with it.

When you do that, when you look for the consistent narrative thread through the Bible, you will find that it is a love story. It is a love story with God as the main character, the protagonist. The people of the world are the object of that love, both as individuals and as a group.

We, humanity, are the unfaithful. We are the broken and are continually running after the things (the people, the ideas, the objects) that we think or hope will fix our brokenness, soothe our wounds, or at least allow us to forget about them for a while, helping us to feel like we have some control over our lives. The tragedy of world events both what we have seen in the past and the downright scary things in our present are blatant examples of this. Meanwhile, our God waits for us to come to him.

No one, nothing, can fix our brokenness but God. We cannot do it for ourselves. It would be like performing surgery on ourselves. You may see that kind of thing attempted in movies or on tv, but it never turns out well. Even if a doctor is directing the procedure on him or herself, they need someone else to physically do it. We see the rescuing, the saving activity of God over and over again in the Bible. God demonstrates his love for us, over and over again.

When it says that Jesus explained to the disciples what was said in the Scriptures concerning himself, it isn't Jesus lifting some verses out of context, or even a lot verses out of context. He is talking about this *whole redemptive story*. How it all points to a God that pours himself out to save humanity. There are some specific promises as well, but ultimately Scripture shows the love of God requires this, and humanity cannot do it for themselves. This is what had to happen, and now it just had happened. *

When Jesus tells this story, naturally he is using the Older Testament because the New Testament had not been written yet. For you truly to understand the New Testament, you at least need to be familiar with the Old Testament. Then, you will see it too. With Jesus as your guide, you may find your heart burning within you too.

Then, we have the breaking of the bread, this meal that remains central in our practice as followers of Jesus and as a community. As we participate in this holy mystery today, in holy communion, we feed on the Word. As Jesus quotes to Satan, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4), a passage that comes from

Deuteronomy 8:3. (As it happens a perfectly appropriate use based on the context. Check it out.)
Jesus as the Word. Jesus also as the bread of life, one of the necessary things for true life. "This is my body broken for you." (1 Cor 11:24)

As we have communion and you take the bread in a little while, think about all of this that has been done for us. Through these two things together Scripture and our sacred meal, we experience the risen Christ. Our eyes are opened, and we recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. We experience the love of God, and we become a part of this love story.

Did That Just Happen? Yes, it did. Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed!

Amen!

*NT Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, pg 294-5.