

At Emmaus Sermon

May 7, 2017

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Luke 24:28-35

²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[j] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us^[k] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Pray with me:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The scripture from Luke 24:32 says,

³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us^[k] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Today, we continue our sermon series on Bloom – Breaking Through to Joy.

We have been sharing stories of the resurrection of Jesus and today we focus on the Emmaus story.

This story is a familiar one to some. It is a story about Cleopas and his friend.

They were both followers of Jesus. They ate meals with him, they heard his teachings about how to care for others and they studied the Scriptures with him.

They were with Jesus when he healed people and followed him from town to town.

Cleopas and his friend were there with Jesus when he made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

They saw the crowd cheering for Jesus and saying, “Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest!”

They were there at the Last Supper, when Jesus said someone would betray him.

They were also there when the crowd turned on Jesus and said, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"
Cleopas and his friend were also there when Jesus died on the cross.

They heard his cry of agony.

They saw his pain and now he was dead.

Even though some had rumored he was alive, they still didn't believe it.

They were in deep sorrow.

Everything they believed in, and hoped in had died too.

They didn't know what to do.

So, they left Jerusalem and headed for home near Emmaus.

As Cleopas and his friend were heading back home, a stranger starts walking with them.

This stranger was Jesus, but they don't recognize him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing while you walk along?"

Cleopas answered, (I love this line) *"Are you the only one in Jerusalem that doesn't know that Jesus is dead? Jesus was a prophet, mighty in deed and word. He was the one we had put our hope and trust in. We thought for sure he was the one to redeem Israel, but now he is dead."*

The stranger started talking to them.

He used stories from Scripture to show them that all of these things had to happen.

These stories from the Scripture had to be familiar to Cleopas and his friend.

They would have remembered Jesus telling them these stories.

When they got to their destination, they started to go inside, when they realized that this man was continuing on his journey.

They stopped him, and urged him to stay with them since it was almost dark.

So, he stayed.

As they were eating dinner, this stranger takes the bread and breaks it in half.

For Cleopas and his friend, at that moment their life was instantly changed.

They realized it was Jesus that was eating dinner with them.

Jesus wasn't dead after all, but alive! He really did rise from the dead! As soon as they recognized him, Jesus vanished.

They immediately left the house and ran all the way back to Jerusalem to share the news with the other disciples.

It is true! Jesus really is alive!

Hope and faith was restored to Cleopas and his friend and their lives will never be the same again!

This is a great story and I know next week, Dr. Gardner is going to spend some more time with this story.

But for today, I want to focus on interesting points – What was Jesus telling them while they were on the road, why was it at the "breaking of the bread" that their eyes were opened, and what does communion mean for us today?

Luke 24:32 says, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"*

Luke 24:27 says, *"Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures."*

We don't know all the things Jesus shared with them on the road, just this little passage.

However, we can be certain, he reminded them about how he lived his life and how he expects others to live their lives.

I am sure he also talked about the great commandment which we know

from the Gospel of Matthew:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to go back and visit my home town.

My son wanted to see the house I lived in and the neighborhood where I grew up.

I was so excited to show it to him and share the stories.

Now it had been 40 years since I lived there and things had changed, but I was still able to tell him about my childhood neighborhood.

When I was growing up, it was an idyllic neighborhood with doctors, lawyers and CEOs.

The mayor of our town lived on our block too.

My Mom and Dad grew up in this neighborhood as well.

In fact, they lived next door to each other.

Yes, my Mom literally fell in love and married the man next door.

My Dad had just returned from the war, went back to school to get his degree and discovered the little girl next door wasn't so little anymore.

When they married, they moved into the house he grew up in.

They spent the next 30 years living in the same quaint neighborhood and they raised three children.

So, this is where I grew up.

We lived three houses down from the park where there was a playground, little league baseball and midget football.

It was close to the tennis courts and boat docks on the river that went through town.

There were fireworks every 4th of July by the river and boat races on Labor Day.

It truly was a great place to live.

However, it wasn't until I started telling my son about the neighborhood that I realized I actually grew up in a very unique neighborhood that has made me what I am today.

You see, I started talking about the neighbors around my childhood home – who they were, their stories.

We had the Jewish family that lived on the corner across the street from us and the Mormon family that lived next to them.

We had the guy across the street from us that went deer hunting every season and always showed off his prize deer carcasses to the neighborhood kids when he got back.

We had the grumpy old man on the corner by the park that would always come out while we were playing and take our balls if they went into his yard. He took our basketballs, volleyballs, tennis balls, whiffle balls – you name it.

We had quite a few houses that had widows that lived in them.

The widow down the street and the widow next door to her, both lived with their sons that took care of them.

The house directly across the street from us had a widow too – Mrs. Johnson.

I always remembered her living by herself.

She was a sweet lady and taught me how to crochet.

Then one day, an older gentleman moved in with her and we soon discovered that it was her boyfriend.

The house right next to me was owned by an older lady who had her two daughters living with her.

One daughter was divorced and had two boys that she saw on the weekends.

The other daughter had a live-in girlfriend.

I remember when I was around 12 or 13 asking my father about our neighbors.

I had begun to realize that even though we all lived on the same block and were part of the community, we all had different lifestyles and not one was the same.

My Dad told me that Mrs. Johnson (the widow across the street from us) couldn't afford to get married otherwise she would lose money and maybe even the house – that for financial reasons, they were better off living together than getting married.

He was happy that they both found love again.

Then he told me that Kay and Pat (the two women that lived next door to us that were a couple) were great people, that he worked with Pat, and he was extremely happy for them.

Then he said this, “even though people have different lifestyles, we are still called to love them – not judge them.”

We also had a defense lawyer and his family that lived across from us.

I used to babysit their children and take care of their pets while they were on vacation.

When I got a little bit older, we had a neighbor who was murdered.

The whole neighborhood and town was in disbelief that someone could have done to someone in our neighborhood.

This lawyer ended up defending the person accused of the murder.

I couldn't understand why he would defend someone that killed one of our neighbors.

I was so angry and I asked him during that time, “Why are you defending him? You know he is guilty.”

He said to me, “We all deserve to have someone defend us and help us no matter what we have done.”

I share all this with you, because as I was sharing these stories with my son, my eyes were opened much like the disciples in the Emmaus story.

I realized that even though the neighborhood wasn't as idyllic as I remembered - there was a lot below the surface - but that is what made it perfect.

I did live in one of the best neighborhoods ever.

You see, I grew up with great parents and neighbors that taught me to love others for who they are instead of judging them for who I think they should be...and I think that was some of what Jesus was saying to Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus.

He was reminding them about the stories in the scriptures.

So, what are some of the scriptures that we know?

The scripture from the prophet Micah: To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Or in the other words:

*“Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,
be compassionate and loyal in your love to others. (The Message)*

The Great Commandment: To Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your mind...and to love your neighbor as yourself.

John 3:16 - God so loves the world...

Jesus was reminding them about how he lived his life and how he expects others to do the same – that even though we come from different backgrounds and have different lifestyles, we are all loved by God – and we are to love others as God loves us.

All are our neighbors. Everybody!

And we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I have been reading a book called, Fear of the Other, by Bishop William Willimon.

Our Church and Society group is leading a study on it this Tuesday at 6:30 pm and everyone is welcome to come.

He quotes from 1 John 4:

“Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

He goes on to say that God has created us to live with God and created us for communion with each other.

We celebrate a risen Christ who is with us and will be with us always.

He says, *“Jesus is resurrected, the same Jesus who commanded us to not only love neighbors but also enemies, to bless those who harass us, and to welcome strangers.*

We are to love our neighbors. All of our neighbors. No exceptions.

We as a church community come from different backgrounds and different places, but we come together every Sunday to share in our love for God and our love for one another.

God has created us to live with God and created us for communion with each other.

In the UMC, there are only two sacraments – Baptism and Communion.

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

They are both means of grace – of a way of knowing who God is and who we are in relationship to God.

Communion is open to anybody that wishes to partake.

This is one of the things I love about the Methodist church.

You don't have to be a member of this church.

You don't have to be baptized first.

We believe that this table of Holy Communion is the Lord's table and not the table of the United Methodist Church.

Communion is a means of grace.

A time where God works with in us and stirs our hearts to love as God loves.

A time where Christ reveals himself to us.

A time where we can build on our relationship with Christ and with each other.

Nobody, no matter what age is denied communion in the Methodist church.

We are also aware of special needs of others.

Therefore, we have gluten and dairy free wafers along with the bread.

The whole loaf signifies the unity of the church as the body of Christ and when it is broken and shared, it signifies our fellowship in that body.

The use of the common cup (chalice) represents Christian unity and love.

The use of Grape juice instead of wine goes back to the temperance movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries where the Methodist church had great concern for those that may have problems with alcohol.

Since, all are welcome at the communion table, including children, the decision was made to only use grape juice.

When we take the sacrament of communion, we are coming together as the body of Christ, sharing in the meal with one another as a community.

Then we are called to go from this place and to take the love of Christ into our neighborhood, city, nation and world.

Just like Cleopas and his friend did after they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. They didn't stay in Emmaus.

They left immediately to go back to Jerusalem and to tell others that Jesus is risen. He is alive.

We too are to go from this building and tell others the good news of Jesus Christ.

We are to be the hands and feet of Christ to a world that is hurting.

To love others as Christ loves us. Amen.