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Title: Road to Emmaus

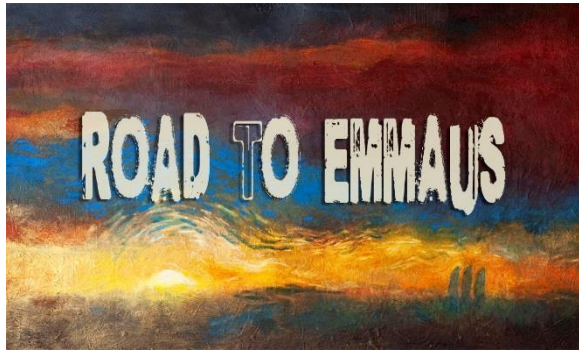
Date: April 14 & 15, 2018

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Luke 24:13-27](#)

Text: [Luke 24:28-35](#)

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I have a well-known colleague who spent his career as a guest preacher. He was a fabulous storyteller and as such, had a file of great stories that he used to illustrate his sermons. Some suggested that all he did to prepare was to reach into the box, pull out a few cards and start preaching. This may be accurate because there was a

story told about one of his last sermons given to a gathering of ministers. He took the pulpit and then, began to look anxiously around the congregation filled with his fellow ministers. He appeared too nervous to speak. Finally, the host went to his side and whispered to him, "What's the problem? Is there someone here who's heard the sermon before?" "No," he said. "I was looking to see if there's anybody who hasn't heard it before!"

I feel his pain. You know this story, perhaps as well as the stories of Easter. It is it about two followers walking home from Jerusalem after Jesus was killed. It is the "Road to Emmaus." You know it not just because it is preached on almost every year. You know it because you have walked this walk.

There is nothing sadder than the trip home from a death. Whether it is the tragedy of the unexpected or the grief that comes at the end of a full and long life, when you head home, there is heartbreak. Sometimes, there is nothing to say. I have experienced this silence with you when we've walked out of a hospital. I experienced it myself on the journey home from the death of my parents. Time drags when your heart is broken.

Eventually, there is the need to talk about what won't be and then, all of the "d" words come out. Disappointment, disillusion, defeat, despair and yes, of course, death. These are the words of broken hearts. Death always brings out the "d" words. Even though they were speaking a different language, even though the words didn't begin with the same letter, the two walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus used words that mean the same.

On Good Friday, hopes were dashed. "We were hoping that he was the One who was about to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21a) But the public spectacle of crucifixion dashed hope. The dream of redemption was over. Add to this the indignity of a violated tomb and how can you not end up with a broken heart?

"We were hoping." You know that hope is fragile. When hope is stolen from you, you fall hard. When you hope that you will get the promotion and another is named, hope abandons you. When you hope that your daughter will reconcile with her husband, but divorce still comes, hope deserts. When you hope for word of a cure, but the tests come back positive, hope is dashed. Hope is fragile. It can leave you and when it does, it breaks your heart. Two followers, seven miles, hope gone, hearts broken.

It is the same road that many of us have walked. It is the same road that some of you are on right now. For some reason, your heart is broken. Something happened in your life and you are playing out all of the "d" words. You are disappointed with your spouse, or disillusioned with your kids, or disenchanting with your job or discouraged about your health. It leaves you feeling defeated about your life. We have all walked this road at some time or another. Some are walking it right now.

When your hope deserts and your heart is broken, defeat is in the air. But when there is defeat, there is always the possibility of victory. As the two walk home, a stranger joins them. Because we know this story, we know that the stranger is Jesus, resurrected from the grave. They do not recognize him. Hopeless people are like this. When hope is stolen away from you, you can miss things right in front of you. The "d" words can blind you to any possibility that God has something else in store. Jesus asks, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking discouraged." (Luke 24:17) Discourage—a "D" word. When grief engulfs you, when you are discouraged, you need to talk. Grief specialists say to get over a loss and experience healing, you have to talk. Over and over again, you must tell your story. When you lose a job, you talk about the circumstances, sort it through until it makes sense. When your marriage breaks up, you seek a counselor to talk it through and talk it out. When you lose a loved one, you tell about her life. You remember what he meant to you. You recall what made her special, how he shaped your life and gave it meaning. You tell it over and over again until you are just told out. That's what gets us through it; that's what slowly heals a broken heart.

Jesus knows this because God knows how to mend a heart. It requires a listening ear and a loving community. Those things are here and they were there, on the road to Emmaus.

When we grieve a listening friend serves two roles. The first is support. Jesus actively listens to the two tell the story of his own life as they walk together on the road to Emmaus. Jesus knows they need to talk it out. He didn't interrupt them when they got it wrong, which they surely did. He didn't clarify what this or that meant. Jesus just hears them tell the story of his own life and they seem to know it all.

- They know the Christmas story that Jesus is from Nazareth.
- They know he preached and performed mighty deeds, just like the prophets
- They know that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
- They even know that the tomb is empty and that women have seen him raised from the dead.
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They know everything there is to know about Jesus, except what any of it could possibly mean for them. They know it all. Jesus just listens, which is the first role a listening friend serves.

But a good friend does more than listen. He can also serve the role of interpretation and perspective. We begin to heal when we put our grief into the context of what God is doing in the world. Jesus doesn't say, "Snap out of it," or "You've got to get over it." Rather, Jesus places their sorrow within the context of God's work in the world. "...beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). Your heart begins to mend when you can see your life in the context of God's redemptive action in the world. God can and will take the tragedy of our lives and turn them into bright and promising tomorrows. That's the message of Easter. The destructive power of the cross is transformed into a new possibility. Every experience of despair, every disillusionment, every defeat, even death itself has the potential for something new and promising. As the doors of our lives close, new doors await to be opened. Remember what Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10).

The healing of a broken heart doesn't happen on its own. All of us have known people who are stuck. The "D" words so encompass their lives that they see disaster around every corner. They cannot imagine that death or destruction or defeat can turn into new a life or victory or triumph. So they spend the precious days of their lives walking the endlessly from Jerusalem to Emmaus without any thought of asking God to open a door and heal their broken heart. But in this story, the two grieving followers offer the invitation.

Cleopas and his companion want to be made whole. They want to make sense of the crucifixion and an empty tomb. So they invite Jesus in, literally urge saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them” (Luke 24:29)

Because we love this story, we know that with that invitation, not only the scene changes, so does the energy. The stranger remains a stranger until dinner. Then, suddenly they begin to sense that they know this man. You’ve had this experience, haven’t you? You meet someone and at first, you think he is a stranger. Then, slowly but surely, something is said or you see him from a different angle and you think, “I think I know him. I’ve met him before. ” You can’t put your finger on it. A name doesn’t come to mind. But you have this feeling that you know this person.

It’s not surprising that this happens when they go to the table. When you read Luke’s Gospel straight through, one of the things you notice is that Jesus eats his way to the Cross. Luke records six meals which Jesus shares and at those meals, some of his most important teachings are shared. A seventh comes the night Jesus is betrayed when Jesus deviates from the script. He takes bread and wine and says, “This is the new Passover, a new way to leave behind the darkness of despair and find a renewed life, to Passover from the bondage of sorrow and find freedom. It’s my promise and it can be yours if, whenever you break bread and pour wine, remember me.

He said that on Thursday; this was Sunday evening. So, as a stranger, “...he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him...” (Luke 24:33) At that moment, all of the “d” words are thrown aside and all of their words began with “R.” They recognized him. They remembered what he said. They realized, he was resurrected. All of this when they received bread and wine. Then, “They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed...’” (Luke 24:34-35a)

Jesus wasn’t the only one raised at Easter. The spirit of his disciples was raised. Their broken hearts were mended. In a simple meal of bread and wine, God transformed them, turning hopelessness in to hope, sadness into joy, grief, and confusion into the explosive excitement that gives birth to the church. Discouraged disciples were renewed and revitalized because they

now knew everything there was to know about Jesus, including what it means for them.

How about you? Do you know what it means for you? It is an important question because the truth of Easter is only powerful when we understand it personally. If God can take the destructive power of the cross and transformed it into renewed life, then God can take every experience of despair, every disillusionment you feel, even the experience of your death, and raise and resurrect your life. That's the truth of Easter, a personal truth for today and tomorrow.

That's the good news of Easter and it should be good news for all of us sitting here for I know that on any given weekend, we gather as a variety of people. Some of us are joyful because the previous days and weeks were filled with incredible blessings. Life couldn't be any better. Others of us come filled with "D" words. We are walking our own Emmaus road and hearts are broken. We are discouraged and disappointed. Many of us are somewhere in between hopelessness and hope, between defeat and renewal. Where might you be? What's the status of your heart?

The truth of the road to Emmaus is this. Jesus wants to be your companion on whatever road you are traveling. He wants to listen to your story and offer a context for your life in God's world. If you are discouraged, he wants to take all of your "D" words and turn them into words like risen and renewal. If you are joyfully blessed, he wants to remind you of your resurrection blessings. And for those who are in between, he wants to both remind us and renew our walk.

It can happen. It may have already happened, you know. Just a moment ago, when you ate and drank at this table, that strange feeling with you wasn't because the grape juice was old or the bread stale. It wasn't heartburn after all; rather, that burning sensation you feel in the presence of Jesus. It's available, each week, not on the road to Emmaus. It comes when you sit down at this table, take bread, drink wine and remember.