

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Conversations with Jesus without knowing it"
Dr. J. Dent

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Third Sunday of Easter

What we do here every week is not a mystery to you, unless you are new, and if you are, welcome here! But if you had to reduce this service, this time together to only one element, what would that element be? Would it be the musical worship? The hymns, the choir, the organ, the songs? Would it be the prayers, the time for personal reflection, the silence? Would it be the sermon and childrens' time talk? Would it be the reading of the Scripture? Or the offering? Or the benediction and choral amen? Or the reading of Living Faith or the Catechism? What one thing would you keep and why?

In our membership class, we wondered out loud what would be kept. The reformers of old would keep the Scriptures, if nothing else, because in them, we have the counsel of God, the special revelation where God reveals himself to humanity. And so we do keep a list of four readings every week to remind us where we come from, and where we are going. Strangely enough, this is not what some churches have chosen. Some have musical worship, a sermon and some prayer, and that's it. Maybe you might receive a verse or two. But the public reading of Scripture is becoming more and more optional, it appears, as many congregations choose to emphasize other things. We choose a different road, to emphasize the reading of Scripture not only here publicly, but privately as well.

The Scriptures, particularly the Gospel this week, bring us back to an encounter with the living Jesus on the road. Several aspects of this encounter are funny, i.e. unusual. First, we know the names of two of the three men involved, Jesus and Cleopas. We don't know the name of the third, although he certainly would have known his own name and Cleopas'. So the two walking on the road knew their names but not Jesus' and we know one of their names and Jesus' name. God knows us all.

I note this because I've had a book in my library for many years called *Everyone in the Bible* by William Barker, published by Revell. In the preface to this book, the author notes that he has listed every name in the Bible, every person who is named does not exactly reveal who they are, especially those in lists, and to complicate things there are people who have the same name, but in many instances are clearly not the same person. What

William doesn't say is that the Bible itself includes a large number of individuals without mentioning their name. In fact, it would be interesting to note whether those not mentioned by name outnumber those mentioned by name.

I say this simply because your name and my name are not in the Bible. Now you know Jonathan is in the Bible several times, I mean we are not mentioned because we are not from that era. What we can look forward to, is that day when everyone who has trusted in Jesus Christ's name will be listed in the Lamb's Book of Life.

So here we have these two guys walking down the road to Emmaus, a village 11 km from Jerusalem. They are talking about the recent news and a stranger comes up behind who apparently is ignorant about all the recent events, perhaps because he has not been able to hear the news for some reason. So Cleopas and his buddy explain to the stranger what's been in the headlines in this last week which came to be known as Holy Week, or Easter.

They begin explaining to this stranger about Jesus. They call him a prophet, mighty in deed and word, but then he was tortured to death. We thought that was the end of it, but some of our women are telling us angels came and explained that he is alive again. Some of us went to check it out, but only found the empty tomb.

Then all of a sudden, the tables are turned. The stranger not only knows all this, but is able to explain why it is all happening. And where does he go to tell them what is happening? He goes to the Holy Scriptures.

He tells them that as Moses led the people out of the land of slavery and into the promised land, so the Messiah will lead people out of their sins and into the kingdom of God, starting here and going into eternity. He tells them about the Passover lamb and how the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, for all who trust him will see eternal life and the angel of eternal death will not touch them. He tells them about the matzoh, the Passover unleavened bread, how it is pierced through, as the Messiah was pierced for our transgressions, and how the bread is bruised as the Messiah was bruised for our iniquity, and how the bread is striped because by the Messiah's stripes we are healed.

He tells them that Jesus taught them that he must die, but would come back to life; but they hadn't understood. Cleopas and his buddy were understanding now. And we too can understand, because the Holy Spirit helps us understand and draws us into the grace of trusting Jesus Christ to be the One he claims to be.

And all this happens without either Cleopas or his buddy ever even knowing that it was indeed Jesus talking and teaching. Sometimes we come to church, and we hear someone speaking. It may be the Lord speaking through them to us. We need to pay attention in a way that our lives depend upon. We are now a part of the body of Christ. We should not be surprised that the Lord would speak through someone here. Jesus speaks through those who love him quite often. The question will continually be whether we have the hearing, the will to hear him speaking.

Cleopas and his buddy were shocked when the Lord was made known to them at the dinner table. It was not a Passover meal. Luke doesn't even use the same verbs that he used for Communion, for Eucharist. It was a common breaking of bread, made holy by the Lord himself. And so we say prayers of thanksgiving every time we eat, whether at home, or in public, or somewhere else, because the Lord is with us.

We acknowledge that there are times when the Lord is with us, and speaking to us, but for whatever reason, it is hard for us to hear, or even acknowledge that the Lord is with us. The antidote for this is the daily reminder that we cannot hide from God, and that is a good thing. We therefore consciously choose to welcome God to our common meals, our snacks, our conversations, our reflections, our feelings, our confusion, our wondering, our amazement, our Mother's Day celebrations, and every other celebration, we welcome the Lord. At least I hope we can feel free enough to do so. Some say it is only fanatics who do so. I say why is it that the word "fanatic" or "fan" is only a positive word at sports events. Let's be fans of the Lord wherever we are, and not ashamed of what we believe.

The Lord disappeared, seemingly as easily as he appeared last week through the locked doors of the room in which the disciples were waiting. Transportation will not be one of great disabilities in the life to come.

Meanwhile we are urged to listen to the Lord, to listen to his Word, to listen to his people and seriously consider what we hear for our lives, for our

lifestyles, for our plans, for our programs, for our health, for our well being,
for our identity, for all that we need.

Let us pray.