

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"I Didn't Know It Was You"
Dr. J. Dent

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(Third Sunday after Easter)

Much of our lives can be symbolized by just walking along the road, as those two men did on the road to Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. They were just going about their business, filling their day with travel for what purpose, we don't know. Many of us travel similarly. Some of us travel for business. Some of us travel for seeing family. Some of us travel just to get away to a warmer spot. Some of us travel to see somewhere new. Some of us only travel to church and back to our homes, and that's about it. Traveling is the way we move through space. Scheduling and surprise encounters are the way we move through time.

We don't know why these gentlemen were on the road. We just know they were there. They had made a choice to go from point A to point B. What happened on the way only partly involved their choice.

So it goes with our lives. We think we have all the plans in the world, many things all figured out. We've made many choices to get to where we are. But still they are many choices awaiting us, and there are many circumstances and situations beyond our control.

Perhaps you've known someone who has worked their whole life, and made many retirement plans, but then as soon as they finish their formal working life, they find out they only have a little while to live. Jesus told a parable about a guy who was well off, well stocked in agricultural supplies. He built more and more storage facilities, but as soon as he felt he had enough, and thought the good life was before him, all of a sudden, he lost his life.

Our mortality is a constant reminder that our plans and our day to day living both are dependent on the Lord. Even our friendships and supportive relationships are an amazing mercy to us. Not everyone we meet are people with whom we can bond and grow close to. Those we cherish, those who make our lives worth living also are dependent on the mercy and grace of God. They are not permanent, as we are not, in this life.

So it is a wonderful thing to take a moment, and simply give thanks for that moment of life. Within that moment is the whole of life. Within that one

breath of thanksgiving, is a foretaste of an eternity of praise and worship which believers have a chance to both hope for and experience. Take a moment right now, and give thanks for your life, for your friends, for your family, for your health.

Last week Major Rowe reminded us of the need for prayer. I agree. This congregation needs to pray more (every church does). I need to pray more. In those few moments of connecting with the Life Giver, we have the essence of life available to us, we experience the most basic of life exercises, who we are, and why we are here.

Those two fellows who were on the road, one named Cleopas (short for Cleopatros, which would mean something like glory of the father, *kleos + pater*), and they weren't praying or doing much of anything, as far as what is recorded. They were minding their own business. And all of a sudden, someone walks up behind them and begins to engage them in conversation. We know right away who it is, but they didn't know. Just as many of us go through our lives, encountering many different people, so they encounter this stranger.

And we don't know how well they knew Jesus, or even if they had ever met him. We do know they had hoped he had been the Messiah, but that those hopes had been dashed by the cruel torturing to death of the Cross. They encountered Jesus here on the road, but they knew it couldn't be him, so they were "kept from recognizing Him," literally "their eyes were restrained."

Sometimes we too think God couldn't possibly be speaking through someone, some stranger who comes into our lives. But this stranger opens the Scriptures to these two, and teaches them, probably from Isaiah 53, about the suffering servant bearing our sins, and healing us by his wounds. He teaches them that the One cursed on a tree, took the curse of our sinful behaviour and attitudes onto himself, and lets us go free into a new relationship with God. The ugly cross becomes like the serpent lifted up and placed on a pole in the wilderness that Moses taught about in Numbers 21, where if we look up and believe what he did was for us, for me, that we are healed, I am healed, then we are healed.

He taught them that the Messiah was going to be despised and rejected. And the Scripture records that Cleopas and his friend experienced “a burning of their hearts as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them.” (v. 32)

Now this is not just another experience of heartburn. There was no indigestion involved here. This was a way of saying that the core of these men's lives were touched as Jesus spoke the truth from the Scriptures about himself. And I believe this continues to happen for all of us who sit down with other believers and study the Scriptures together. It's not about getting a warm feeling in your heart, but it is about be touched to the core of your being by the One who created you. That's why I will always encourage you to make Bible study a part of your weekly routine, and Bible reading a part of your daily routine. We need, I need to be touched by this same person who spoke so well on the road. And if you have had bad experiences of studying the Bible, give God another chance in this area. May I suggest that the life giving experience of meeting with the risen, living Jesus, who opens both the Scriptures and our hearts and minds, continues today. If you'd like to call it “spiritual heartburn,” I'm okay with that, but you should probably make reference to the Emmaus Road passage we are studying so others will understand.

The two men still hadn't recognized Jesus as he was doing Bible Study with them on the road. They had been together a couple of hours at least, and now they urged to come home with them to their place. Jesus seemed to have other business, but finally was convinced. He went home with them.

Just as we too can invite the Lord home with us. We can invite Him to open the Scriptures to us as well. And when they begin to have a meal with Jesus, Jesus takes bread and breaks it and gives it to them. At that moment, their eyes are opened. Some interpret this as an encouragement to meet with Jesus at the communion table. We have an experience of opened eyes in the sacrament. Others encourage us to think about this as a way to invite Jesus into every meal, not only with a prayer of thanksgiving, but inviting the Spirit and attitudes of Jesus to be with us as we talk with one another, and catch up on our days, and appreciate all that we have together. Both of these interpretations are correct.

It's all about an encounter with Jesus Christ. Sometimes in our lives, we get so busy, we forget our spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading, we go in our lives until something or Someone stops us. And God wants to talk

to us, to speak words of love over us, to sing in our ears, if we would but take the moment to listen.

Sometimes it is a crisis that stops us. Sometimes it is a tender moment. Sometimes it is a relationship difficulty that is beyond our control, beyond our abilities to understand or fix. Sometimes it is an addiction. Sometimes it is a loss.

But when our eyes are opened, when we know it is the Lord taking care of us, drawing us to Himself. Enjoy that moment. Because as soon as you breathe in that moment, as soon as you recognize how precious that moment is, then, before you know it, everything returns to normal, to the mundane, to the ordinary.

That's what happened in the story. As soon as they knew it was the Lord, he disappeared. We don't really know why he chose to disappear. I just know that often times of intimacy with God are followed by the everyday, mundane stuff that teaches us to remember He is there, and He is speaking, even when we cannot see Him.

We need to listen. We need to report that He is alive, and well, and real in our lives, as those two fellows did do. The great treasures we own are those encounters with Jesus, where He tells us who He is, and tells us who we are, who I am. And we have the privilege of telling others, as we have the experiences that we have. I've found that we need to share these experiences, because sharing about our friends, and those closest to us is something that comes naturally. But giving a theological discourse on the nature of God and all the needed rationale for theological proofs is not usually what people are looking for. Don't hear me wrongly. We need to make sense, and describe what has happened to us in encounters with the Risen Jesus.

Because Christianity is all about relationship to Jesus. The ethics we do, the justice we do, the evangelism we do, the philosophizing and theologizing that we do, the politics, the economics, the community building, the business relationships, academics, medicine, travel, entertainment, everything we do is affected profoundly by the depth of our encounters with Jesus, to the glory of the Father, and by the power of the Spirit.

Sometimes we don't recognize Jesus is there with us. Sometimes we finish our days, and say, "I didn't realize it was you" there waiting to talk to me, longing to touch the core of who I am. In this Easter season, I encourage you to take the moments, and to realize who it is who wants to speak with you. It is Jesus.

Let us pray.