

“Take Your Time”

As most of you know, I have lost a lot of weight since the end of 2019. I had a stomach-reducing surgery on New Year’s Eve and I am now about 60 pounds lighter. Some two months after the surgery, I went to the drive-thru at my local dry cleaners for the first time and the lady at the door stared at me for a while and finally said, “Is that you Wally?” Although she has known me for twenty years, she did not recognize me because of my weight loss.

Today’s scripture passage is from Luke 24:13-35, known as the walk to Emmaus. It is a story of non-recognition. The Emmaus story is so full of wonderful material for theological reflection, preaching and discussion that the natural temptation is to try to deal with too much at one time. The Emmaus story responds by sharing that the presence of the Lord is known in experiences that transcend the events of the resurrection appearances. Today we will focus on three themes which are important for our lives as Christian disciples.

Two of the disciples are making their way home from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Easter Sunday. This is about a seven mile journey and they have just been in Jerusalem for the Passover. They are not part of Jesus’s twelve disciples but were followers. In v. 18 one is identified as Cleopas. The past week had been quite eventful with Jesus riding in on Palm Sunday and then the crucifixion.

They were using this time to talk about what had happened the past week.

One could use the term debriefing. They needed to talk it out. While talking they are met by someone they do not recognize. The reader knows it is Jesus but the two travelers have no idea they are with Jesus. We are not sure why they do not recognize Jesus but the scripture says they are kept from recognizing him. For purposes of this story, we can conclude that God had some reason to keep Jesus' identity from them.

The first theme or lesson we need to learn is that these disciples' eyes need to be opened to the true meaning of Jesus' suffering and death. When Jesus meets them, he basically primes the pump and wants to know what they have been talking about. They relate the events of the past week and focus on their view that the chief priests and the leaders had handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Cleopas echoed the words of Isaiah and that they had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel. But Cleopas relates what some were feeling; they see the crucifixion of Jesus as a frustration of their hope. They wanted Jesus to set up a kingdom on earth and defeat the Romans in some way. This belief is not unusual. When the Israelites had been in Babylonian captivity, they had finally been freed when Cyrus the Great of Persia defeated Babylon. Why not believe in another earthly conqueror?

Cleopas also reports on stories about the empty tomb. There is confusion over whether Jesus has risen. Ironically, these two men who had followed Jesus did not recognize Jesus and still did not understand the meaning of his suffering.

Jesus then begins to speak and points out that those who do not see the suffering and crucifixion as a fulfillment of the scriptures are foolish. A study of the scriptures reveals that Moses and the prophets declared that the suffering of the Messiah was necessary. It was part of God's providential plan of Israel and the salvation of sinners. The fulfillment consisted not only in Jesus' suffering but in his entering into glory (v.26). The resurrection or the ascension may be seen as "into his glory." Jesus' suffering and glory fulfilled Moses and the prophets.

The lesson for us today is we often have ideas about what needs to be done but we get sidetracked. These disciples were focused on Jesus setting up an earthly kingdom on earth and defeating the Romans, and they failed to focus on how Jesus' suffering and death fulfilled the scriptures. Do we focus on the wrong, earthly things? Do we fail to truly understand the scriptures? Do our eyes need to be opened? We need to constantly ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and study the scriptures for our journey as disciples..

The second theme from the Emmaus story is the importance of experience. Jesus has been invited to share a meal with the two men he met on the road. During

the meal Jesus takes the bread, blesses it and gives it to them. As he does this, the men's eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus. This recognition scene is known in classical drama as the *agagnorisis*, the recognition of someone whose identity was previously blind. Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher, writes that "recognition" is a change from ignorance to knowledge. Recognition may be based on visible signs, memory, or reasoning, but the best kind is "that which arises from the actions alone."

The church experiences the continued presence of the risen Lord when it gathers at the Lord's table. Later believers may not have the opportunity to experience an actual appearance by Jesus, but they know he is present when they share their bread with a stranger or gather for the Lord's supper. When Jesus broke the bread, their eyes were opened, and he opened their minds for interpretation of the scriptures.

John Wesley stressed experience as one of the four considerations in interpreting a situation. Let us take the Emmaus experience and reflect that our experiences in our faith are critical to our journey walk as disciples. Let us remember that we can experience the risen Christ in our experiences.

Finally, the third theme from the Emmaus walk is that, in the Gospels, Jesus is interested in savoring ordinary life as he is in passing out extraordinary life. He

is so interested in nature that he uses the lilies of the field to illuminate the extraordinary inside people, is so interested in keeping in touch after he's gone that he offers a lasting memorial to his body and blood.

Jesus' actions suggest that he saving of life is the savoring of life. As discussed by Rev. Kirk Byron Jones, senior pastor of Zion Baptist Church in Lynn, Massachusetts, this is a much needed message in a world addicted to a fast-paced, overcommitted life. To savor is to taste or smell with pleasure, to relish, to delight in. The word originates in the Latin verb *sapere*, which means both "to taste" and "to be wise." The connection between the two has never been more important. The etymology of *relishing* offers layered blessings as well. *Relax, release, and relish* all derive from "*relaxare*," to loosen. Our hyper-stressed existence cries out for the healing of savoring and relishing.

On the day of the resurrection, Jesus chooses to take a slow walk with two disciples and simply enjoy the conversation. The Lord meets us on the road to Emmaus, in the places which we retreat when life is too much for us. We need to savor the moment. Deliberately choosing to savor life may be as simple as holding a gaze just a moment longer; noticing things as we take a slow walk. When we do this, the Lord may come to us in unfamiliar guises, when we least expect him.

Our current situation with coronavirus has given us an opportunity to reflect on life. Although stressful with the changes and anxiety it has brought, it has also given us an opportunity to see what it means to simplify our lives and get away from the fast-paced society in which we live. Hopefully you have been able to savor things you did not before. As Rev. Jones writes, have you been able to appreciate what it means to “take your time?”

There is a moment of glad astonishment at the end of the walk to Emmaus with Jesus. Those who have just spent time with him notice that their hearts were burning within them. In just a short space of time and short number of steps, they have felt more alive than ever before. This communal striding and savoring alongside Jesus has fed them the bread of life.

Jesus, risen from the dead and returned to the confines of time, takes his time. He encourages us to do the same. Truly saved lives are worth savoring each moment, every single day. Take your time!