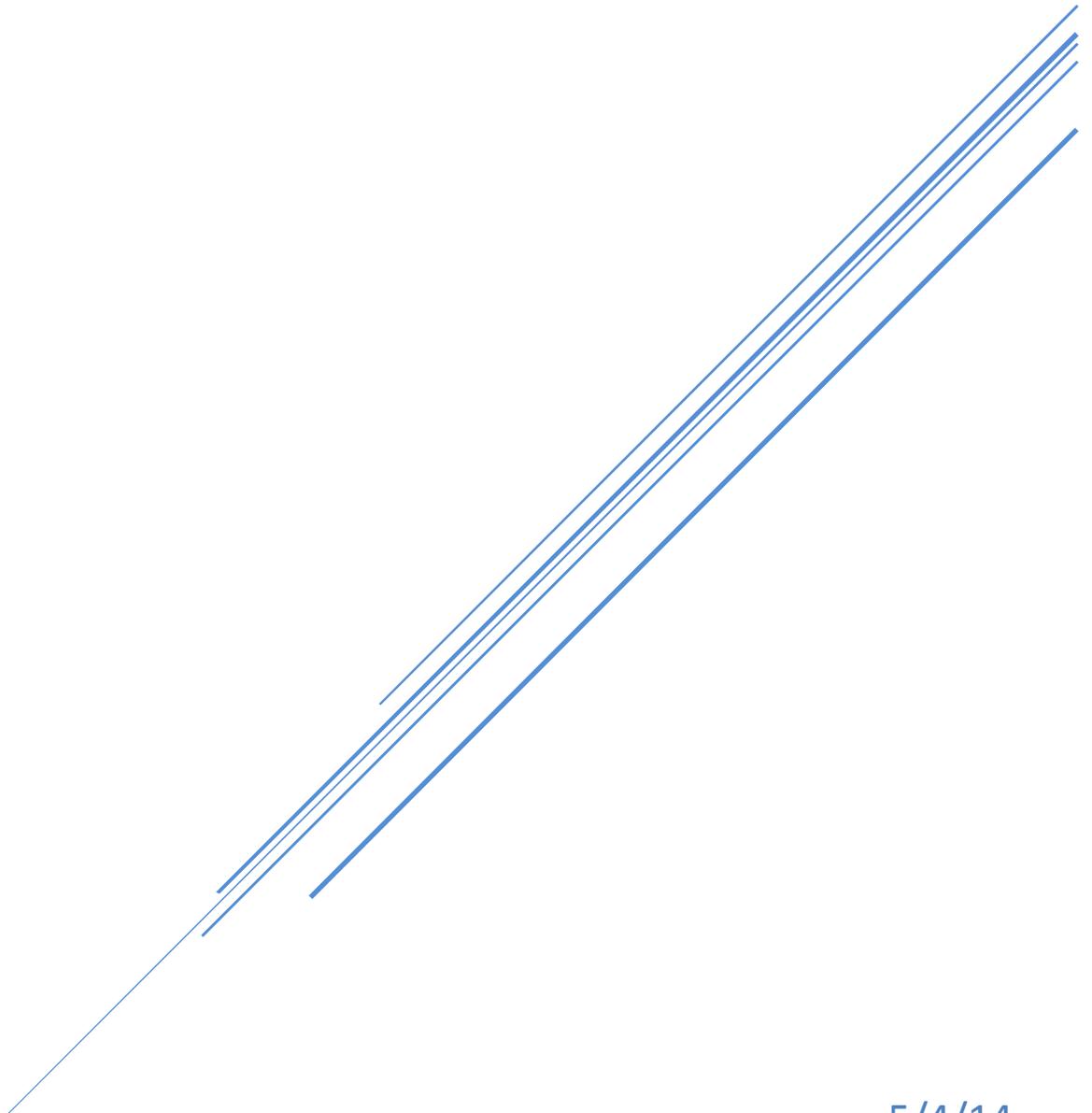


# ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Luke24:13-35



5/4/14  
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The Road to Emmaus: how many people have been on a walk to Emmaus? My church in Florida was very involved in the 'Emmaus' movement. The walk to Emmaus is an experience of Christian spiritual renewal and formation that begins with a three-day short course in Christianity. It's like a retreat. It is an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ in a new way as God's grace and love is revealed to you through other believers. I know there are people here who have experienced the love and fellowship of the Emmaus weekend – anyone? I attended and it changed my life.

There's a young man in Florida who was a member of my youth group there. He was a little bit troubled, he dropped out of high school and was taking classes online and looking for work. He was – I should say he IS – very bright and he and I shared two things in common: church and shoes! It was always fascinating to me that Josh always color coordinated his gangsta style high-tops with whatever he was wearing. Right down to the flat brim cap he always wore backwards. He loved rap and hard core death metal rock music. He was always a good kid, willing to help out, and when he got to be the age of a high school senior I gave him various opportunities to take charge and he was really a good and conscientious leader.

There is a teenager's weekend based on the same 3-day experience that's called Chrysalis. We were really involved in Chrysalis. Kids who had attended were allowed and encouraged to serve on the team. There were a half a dozen adults in the church who served on almost every weekend twice a year. I worked my way up over the years from pouring soda to lay director of the entire weekend.

Anyway, I wasn't sure how much Josh would get out of the weekend but as a youth leader I figured it would be good for him and he went along with it, probably because he knew people who were going. He talked to me afterwards and said he was going to quit smoking pot and had decided to work harder in order to graduate from high school with his friends. It was like a miracle! He wasn't a heavy drug user but he was a cynical kid, maybe skeptical is a better word, and was only at church because his mom said he had to.

Josh became a new creation in Christ. He came to me and wanted more opportunities to lead. He wanted to serve on the next Chrysalis weekend. He asked if he could be the MC at the youth talent show. Now THAT was a miracle! Josh wouldn't get up to speak in front of people if his life depended on it. He had really begun to believe. Why? What happened?

You see, in his 'just showing up' to youth group and Sunday school, and the 3-day Chrysalis experience, Josh's heart had begun to warm up inside of him, like the two men on the road, and he had begun to recognize the living God in the face of the risen Christ. In the darkness and struggle of daily life for a troubled young teen, the Jesus that he learned about in his 'teen study Bible' had finally started to get up off the pages and walk out into the world with him. Jesus had become Josh's traveling companion.

The passage this week is our story.

There they are, these two disciples, as exhausted as they are discouraged as they trudge the seven miles from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. We don't know why they have forsaken the company of their fellow disciples, only that they are now walking home. Perhaps it's all they could think to do.

And Jesus meets them on the way. He doesn't come to them in Jerusalem. He doesn't wait for them at home. He doesn't bid them make some holy pilgrimage or undertake some pious feat. Rather, he meets them where they are - on the road, amid their journey, right smack in the middle of all the pain, frustration, and despondency that threatens to overwhelm them. Even though they don't recognize him.

Notice, now, what takes place. First, he helps them to make sense of the Scriptures, and not just recent events, but also to make sense of all of Scripture -- and indeed, all of life! And then he shares a meal, lifting and blessing bread, breaking it and giving it to them. In these simple actions they recognize him. The eyes of these disciples are opened and they recognize not just the person of Jesus but the presence of the Lord, the God whose powerful word called light from darkness and gives life to the dead.

And then he is gone, and what do they do? they get up, and in the middle of the night they walk the 7 miles back to Jerusalem to tell of what they've seen. Why? Because they can't help it -- news this good just can't keep.

Can you find yourself in this story? As a pastor, I'm blessed and burdened with the privilege of interpreting Sacred Scriptures, and calling the faithful to gather around the sacred meal so that they might recognize Jesus as the one who meets them where they are and accompanies them on their way.

That's what pastors do. Not a bad gig, eh? But guess what – you do it, too! Maybe not quite as formally, but it's what you do. It's in the casseroles, and the Easter lilies. It's in the May tea and the community Garden. It's extended Table.

When Jesus says 'Love your neighbor,' we meet people where they are. We are all called to ministry - not just me, you know - and our actions and behaviors – the way we live our lives – can open up scripture for people like they've never seen, so they can make sense of their lives in the light of Christ, in the light of God's own mercy – shining through you like a one of those science class prisms. Look at how we loved on the Sharp family.

I'm going to toot our own horn for a minute here and tell you that whether or not we agreed with their reasons for going to Nevada, we walked and talked and shared the light of Christ with them in a way that they may not have experienced before. We gathered them to the meal and sent them on their way, back into the world to partner in God's work and to share God's grace.

Christ meets us where we are and makes himself known to us so that we can be sent out to meet others on their journeys and make Christ known to them.

Oh, I know, it's not always that cut and dried. Its hard work and we don't always get it right, but once in a while we get it right, and I want to thank you. On your way out today take a few minute to stop and have a look in the mirror in the narthex. Just a little reminder.

And there's one more cool thing – in verse 28, it says, "As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on." Jesus meets us on the journey. He's there with us, but then he makes as if he's going on – without us? You see? Jesus gives us a choice!

Jesus was never one to shove our belief down our throats. We have a choice. We've always had a choice. Do we invite Jesus to join us?

"Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." It's a beautiful invitation, it almost sounds like a prayer doesn't it? "Stay with us, Lord, for the day is almost over and soon it will be night time." And even then they didn't recognize Jesus!

But – He recognized them. Walking down the road with this stranger, inviting him in for dinner -- perhaps even for the night, which reflects well on the hospitality of the two disciples I might add. But Jesus recognized them, and he saw them as if they were the only two people in the world. Think about it for a second. Jesus the Christ, with who knows how many disciples – there's the 12, and at least 72 that we know of from Luke 10, sent out to preach the Kingdom and heal the sick – all of them except these two grieving and hiding from the Romans. But Jesus walks and talks with these guys like there's no one else. He's totally focused on them.

Listen to what Frederick Buechner says about it:

I believe that the reason why the resurrection is more than just an extraordinary event that took place some two thousand years ago and then was over and done with is that, even as I speak these words and you listen to them, he also sees each of us like that. In this dark world where you and I see so little because of our unrecognizing eyes, he, whose eye is on the sparrow, sees each one of us as the child in red. And I believe that because he sees us, not even in the darkness of death are we lost to him or lost to each other. I believe that whether we recognize him or not, or believe in him or not, or even know his name, again and again he comes and walks a little way with us along whatever road we're following. And I believe that through something that happens to us, or something

we see, or somebody we know - who can ever guess how or when or where? - he offers us, the way he did at Emmaus, the bread of life, offers us a new hope, a new vision of light that not even the dark world can overcome.

That is the word that on Easter Sunday is sounded forth on silver trumpets. And when Easter is past and the silver trumpets have faded away to hardly more than a distant echo, that is the word that is whispered to us like a secret in the dark, the saving and holy word that flickers among us like a red dress in a gray world.

Amen