

## **Broken**

A sermon preached by  
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First United Methodist Church of Evanston  
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### **Luke 24:13-35**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” <sup>19</sup>He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,<sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

<sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

<sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

<sup>32</sup>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?” <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Over the years there has been a lot of debate about the location of Emmaus. The Semitic word means “warm spring,” so many scholars have tried to locate a warm spring seven miles away from Jerusalem. One possibility is the site of a Roman garrison built around a pool of water. If this is the case, Cleopas and his companion were moving toward Roman power. Perhaps the story is a symbolic reference to the Roman power that was displayed in Jesus’ crucifixion. In any case, they were walking away from Jerusalem, and in Luke’s gospel if you avoid Jerusalem, you avoid the true path of Jesus.

The two travelers on this road probably allude to the fact that Christian missionaries were sent out in twos. So, drawn to Roman power, these missionaries are less travelers and more deserters. People who are abandoning the cause of Christ and being drawn back to the allure or threat of Roman power. The story is often called *The Road to Emmaus*, but in reality it is the story of a road *away* from Jerusalem and all of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations that are resident in such a holy city.

If there is any theme that is pervasive in the story, it is the theme of disappointment. Cleopas and his fellow-traveler are disappointed that Jesus didn’t turn out to be the kind of Messiah that they had hoped for. Instead, they simply call him a prophet. They are bummed out that Jesus looks to them now like one of a long line of prophets who had raised their hopes but in the end, didn’t deliver...at least deliver by getting rid of Roman oppression. After the long recitation of the story of his death, they underscore that disappointment by saying, *But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*

The travelers on the road are not the only ones who are disappointed. Jesus himself has more than his share of frustration. Because you see, their failure to recognize Jesus has less to do with his physical characteristics -- nowhere in the scriptures are we told what Jesus looks like physically -- and much more to do with failing to see his missional purpose. He is not sent just to redeem Israel, but instead he is sent to save the world.

If you want to know what Jesus looks like, then all you should do in the gospels is to look at his actions and not his physical characteristics. If you want to know what Jesus looks like then you can see him in his healings, in his reaching out to women, tax collectors, and other marginalized and excluded people. If you want to recognize Jesus then at some point you should expect that as he said, the night before he was crucified, his disciples would recognize him in the

breaking of the bread, in the gathered community, in the collective memory of who Jesus is. To be broken open by Jesus is to move on the road toward him.

All the resurrection appearances of Jesus in Luke take place on the same day. Unlike the stories in Matthew and John where the risen Christ is seen and experienced over a longer period of time, in Luke it's a one and done kind of event. Empty Tomb, Road to Emmaus, Appearance to the Disciples, and his Ascension all happen at breakneck speed. But here on the road, the disciples have already forgotten. Their memory is askew. If you listen to their account of his death, it treats him as a victim not as an active participant in the story. And it is almost as if Jesus is saying, "How many times do you need to be reminded before you will recognize me? Before you understand me? Before you follow me?"

But despite their dimwittedness, their inability or unwillingness to recognize him, on one level they still long for Jesus. When they say, "Stay with us" they are echoing the prayers of the earliest disciples after Jesus' death. Stay with us, don't leave us, help us to remember you, to be your hands and hearts. To heal and bless and give in your name.

John Shea has written that "this is a crucial move in becoming a disciple of Jesus. Jesus always walks further. He outdistances his followers. However, once you ask him to stay, he immediately replies. This is because the invitation to remain shows an openness to him."<sup>1</sup> And this openness is rewarded by a growing presence.

That presence must be nurtured and it is often fleeting. What happens next in the story is almost inevitable. Of course he breaks bread with them, of course they recognize him. The story and the action must be repeated because we forget, we don't get it, we become clueless over time, until once again we "do this in remembrance of me." And the cycle continues.

In the story, *the Road to Emmaus* becomes *the Road Back to Jerusalem*. Cleopas and his unnamed companion are no longer deserters, they are witnesses, a living reminder of the risen Lord.

I don't know about you, but that theme of disappointment resonates in my life. Often I'm disappointed in myself, I carry guilt or pain or regret. Sometimes I'm disappointed in my church or my nation or my friends, but in my better days I can somehow find it within myself to say to Jesus, "Stay with me." Even though I know that you may be disappointed in me, even though I

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<sup>1</sup> John Shea, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven: The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*, Liturgical Press, 2004, p. 172

know that you must think that I am foolish, clueless, lacking in faith. Stay with me so that I too can turn around and head back to Jerusalem.

Friday afternoon the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church, our denomination's ecclesiastical equivalent of the Supreme Court, ruled on a complaint against Bishop Karen Oliveto, who preached here at First Church in January. That complaint in part claimed that the Bishop's election and assignment should be ruled unlawful because she is a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual." The Council supported that complaint by saying that "Under the long-standing principle of legality, no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law...It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop." However, the ruling goes on to say, the bishop "remains in good standing," until an administrative or judicial process is completed. That process is required to come from the Western Jurisdiction, the same Jurisdiction that elected Bishop Oliveto.

This decision is a painful reminder of where we stand as a denomination. It is with great sadness and pain that we confront these realities. I am sure that in the coming weeks we will be praying, thinking, and planning for a response to these realities. But for now, let me assure you that our congregation and our staff will continue to speak and act in a way that we believe is faithful not just to the denomination, but to the gospel. We will say, "Stay with us Jesus." We will continue to welcome all of God's children to this place. If they are gay or straight, queer or transgendered, nonbinary or heterosexual, we will provide all people with the ministry of this church. We will baptize their children, we will preside over their marriages, we will visit them and pray for their healing when they are sick, we will give diapers for their babies and put food on their tables; regardless of their nationality or religion we will welcome them, and if they so desire we will offer them the sacraments of grace and acceptance.

We do so because we see Jesus in each and every person. We may be a part of systems that are broken, just as Jesus was. We ourselves may be broken as well, but we know that the arc of history is long, and eventually it will bend toward justice. Today, it may seem like we are headed to Emmaus, but eventually we will turn around and head back to Jerusalem. That is where Jesus awaits us. And I know and affirm that he will wait for us there as long as it takes for us to recognize him. AMEN