

Luke 24, 2017

The Seven Mile Hike©

April 23, 2017

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So here it is, Sunday evening after a very discouraging – traumatic – three-day weekend. In fact, it had to have been probably the worst experience of their lives. Luke tells us two people are walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, which is a seven-mile hike.

One of the two is identified as Cleopas and the other is unnamed. We don't know for sure who Cleopas was but some early writings claim he could have been a brother to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus and husband of Jesus' mother, Mary.

Luke says these two were disciples, which means in this story that they were followers of Jesus – like you and I are followers, or disciples. The unknown companion in the story is depicted in pictures as another man. In fact, in this picture on the screen we see not just two men, but now a third has joined them.

I've often wondered if the unidentified companion was maybe the wife of Cleopas. It could have been but why didn't Luke just say that? Luke was the Gospel writer who seems to respect and honor women more than most did in his day.

We shall never know for sure who that person is. But what we read here is that these two were very sad – probably really distressed as they talk about the things that happened to Jesus. Horrible things they had witnessed. And the disappointment in now realizing Jesus was not who they had expected and hoped he was.

And we don't know if Emmaus is the home of these two. Why are they going to Emmaus? Is it out of fear and a desire to hide from those who might be seeking to kill Jesus' followers now that they got rid of Jesus? Is the seven-mile hike a dangerous one? Did they fear for their lives as they walked that long walk?

And then along comes a stranger who joins them, wanting to know what they were talking about. They were incredulous that he hadn't heard the news. Apparently, there wasn't anyone in Jerusalem who didn't know what had happened – how Jesus had been beaten and crucified; how he had died and had been buried in a tomb.

“And now, on top of it all, some women found the tomb empty!” They don't know what to think.

And the stranger – Jesus – starts reminding them of all the things that had happened with their ancestors – and all the ways that God had been involved in their history – and all the things the prophets had told would happen.

And he reminded them of what Jesus had said was going to happen. He opened up the Scriptures for them to see for themselves – to remember what they knew about the covenants God had made and the promises that had been fulfilled. He was planting the seeds of belief in their hearts and minds as they were making that seven-mile hike.

A lot can happen on a long walk, can't it?

How many of you like to walk? I know there are a few of our members who enjoy getting together and hiking. What is the furthest you've ever hiked? Seven miles would be a very long hike for me – and probably for many of us.

So many people today are not used to walking very far. We enjoy our rides – our cars or bikes. Walking takes so long and is so inconvenient. But, I have to admit, sometimes when I'm thinking about my sermon or something I'm trying write, just getting out for a walk on a beautiful day and seeing things and hearing sounds can be such an inspiration.

I may be stumped on something I'm thinking about or trying to make sense of and suddenly, when out on a walk, I often see clearly the thing I couldn't see for so long.

Seven miles might seem long to us, but think about Jesus and his disciples. Have you ever considered how many miles they must have walked in Jesus' lifetime?

I read an article in one of my online commentaries - *Homiletics* – that said that if we believe what Matthew tells us about Jesus and his family after fleeing to Egypt for his safety as a baby, Jesus, as a young boy, would have walked about 400 miles with his parents during their return from Egypt to Nazareth.

And every devout Jewish boy and man in Galilee would travel to Jerusalem three times a year for religious festivals. That figures out to be a 240-mile round trip from Nazareth. If Jesus actually did this every year between the ages of 5 and 30, he would have walked 18,000 miles in trips to Jerusalem alone.

And if we look at all the gospel accounts of where Jesus and his disciples went in ministry, they would have traveled 3,125 miles in that three year period.

That's an estimate of 21,525 miles that Jesus walked during his lifetime.

And we know there was a lot that happened while Jesus was on his way to different places. In fact, the journey itself and all the people they came in contact with was basically his main ministry.

The gospel of Mark emphasizes Jesus' three-year journey as he ministered and preached. One of the favorite expressions of the author of Mark is “While they were *on the way*.”

So, while they were on the way to Emmaus, Jesus comes to walk with them and, even though they don't know who he is yet, he talks to them and opens up all the things to them that they already have read about and know. Later they will say, “were not our heart burning inside of us as he opened up the Scriptures to us?”

It seems that was a necessary preparation for what happened when they arrived at their destination. It's always been interesting to me that, even though they asked Jesus to be their

guest, he became the host. He acted like he was going to keep on walking when they arrived at the house, but they asked him to stay with them. And he did.

It seems important here, doesn't it, that all Cleopas and his companion had to do was ask Jesus to stay with them and he was more than willing. And in that asking, the guest became the host as took bread and broke it.

Maybe they were so tired from their traumatic experience; maybe they were in such grief that Jesus just took charge. But of course, he is Jesus, he is the one in charge. He is the comforter and the one who cares.

But when he took that bread and broke it at the table, their eyes were suddenly opened in a new way and they then recognized that it was Jesus.

Look at the picture on the screen. This painting was done in 1601 by the famous baroque painter, Caravaggio. Notice the details in the picture. We see Jesus' full face as he suddenly is recognized. Cleopas is probably the one to the right of the painting, arms outstretched in surprise.

The other one seated is most likely the companion of Cleopas. Many scholars believe that that companion was Luke himself – the author of the gospel. He is so stunned, it looks like he is about to jump up out of his chair.

Notice how the basket of fruit looks like it is teetering on the edge of the table. Probably Cleopas hit it as his arms reached out in surprise. The one standing may be someone who is serving them. He doesn't look really stunned does he? I wish we could talk to the artist and know what he intended by painting this extra person into the story.

Luke tells us that as soon as they recognized Jesus, he suddenly vanished from their sight. And they were so excited they could not finish their meal. Whatever they felt before – exhaustion, grief, despair – they were now full of energy and eager to jump up and go back the seven miles to Jerusalem where they could share the good news with their friends – that Jesus was alive!

And when they got there, they discovered that Jesus had not only shown himself to them but also to Simon Peter. Can you imagine the excited chatter in that room that Easter Sunday night?

So, what are the things we learn from this? One thing I am reminded of is that it can be a very helpful thing to just go for a walk. Get out into the world. Get yourself up and away from the space where you have been stuck.

Walking and talking to God often opens up new revelations. New ideas. Often times, the Holy Spirit will remind us of what we already know, of knowledge that we learned but perhaps buried deep in our hearts and minds.

Of course, it doesn't have to be walking. Some of us aren't able to do that. But sitting out in the sunshine, or going to a sunny space, or just taking ourselves to a new, fresh place can give us new fresh insights.

So often I think the risen Lord comes to join us in our journey yet we are so oblivious to seeing something new – we have our thoughts and minds so stuck on one thing – that we fail to recognize that he is there. Yet if we just listen a little, he will open up things we need to remember – things we need to see.

Also, if we just ask him to stay with us, he will come in and stay. It reminds me of a little song I always loved:

*Into my heart; into my heart; come into my heart, Lord Jesus.
Come in today; come in to stay; come into my heart, Lord Jesus.¹*

Remember the painting of Jesus knocking at the door. It is based on Revelation 3:20 where Jesus says: “*I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*”

Do you know that there is no doorknob on the outside of the door, where Jesus is knocking? The door can only be opened from the inside – by us. And if we open that door, Jesus will go from being our guest to being our host.

And it is in the breaking of the bread at the table here, each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper that we see Jesus anew. We are nurtured and fed by Jesus – our host – as the bread is broken and we eat. And to be able to do that so often makes the song “Every Morning is Easter Morning” so true for us, doesn't it?

And last, when we see the risen Lord – when we truly realize that he is resurrected and lives today – when we begin to grasp what that means for us – that we too will be raised from death to life; we too will have eternal life – then we should naturally be eager to rise up and hurry to be on the way, telling everyone the exciting news – that Jesus Christ is risen and that he is with us always.

Yesterday, we celebrated the 93-year life of Dorothy Leaming. And we gave thanks for the promises we all have because of the resurrection of Jesus, our Lord. Once again, I felt such joy when I said those words in the commendation: “All of us go down to the dust, yet even at the grave we make our song – Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! And that, my brothers and sisters is truly good news!

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