

The Evangelistic Emmaus Walk L 24:13-35

I am not a car guy. Some people know who is at church by knowing the cars in the parking lot. That's not me. But I do know some cars well – but only after a personal experience. I notice Buick Century's. I remember the excitement of buying the most luxurious used vehicle we've ever had for my wife – and the trauma when my daughter totaled it. I'm glad that my daughter wasn't hurt, but I confess, I still feel the glee of my daughter's \$111.00 fine for speeding around a curve & taking the car sideways into a tree. Even today when I see a Buick Century, I often lament, – "That's my car!"

I suspect we all have had the experience of not noticing or paying attention to something, and then something happens & we do. We become more conscious, more aware. It's like this with a lot of things. When we are mindful of animals to hunt, they are there to see. When we are attentive, we notice clothes with our favorite team's name on it. But when we are not sensitive or interested, we miss seeing things.

Joshua Bell is one of the best violinists in the world right now. *The New York Times* wrote that, "Joshua Bell stands in no one's shadow when it comes to playing the violin." A few years ago, he was in an experiment that was the idea of *The Washington Post* newspaper. They got Joshua Bell to set up at a subway station, in Washington, DC. He played right at morning rush hour wearing a baseball hat, blue jeans, and a long-sleeved t-shirt.

He pulled out his violin, put the case out and he threw a couple of dollars and some change into the case. His violin was handcrafted in 1713 by Antonio Stradivari. That's a 3.5 million dollar violin being played by one of the best violinists in the world, in a subway. He played six classical pieces for forty-three minutes. And the fascinating thing about it - you can watch this on YouTube - the amazing thing is: how few people paid attention to him or recognized him. He played the best of the best music. His concerts are often sold out with tickets going

for an average of \$100 a seat. But for this free concert people only dropped just over \$32 into his case. Most people were too intent on getting to work & going about their business. Our gospel story today is about not seeing Jesus – even though he was right beside the 2 travelers.

Have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words in our language begin with the letter D? For example, disappointment, disillusionment, doubt, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, despair and death. Woody Allen once gave the commencement address at Yale University. He said: "Our civilization stands at the crossroads. Down one road is despondency & despair. Down the other road is total annihilation. I hope we'll take the right road." He was trying to be funny, but seriously, we know that noticing and following Jesus is the best option.

Disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, depression, despondency, despair, and death – all these words sum up Cleopas and his friend's feelings as they trudged up the road toward Emmaus. They had left the confused and downhearted band of disciples who were afraid and bewildered over what had happened to Jesus on Good Friday. The two were hopeless and sad. As they walked they tried to understand what had gone wrong, but didn't see Jesus.

The Master they had loved and followed had been horribly put to death – a degrading, cruel and tortured death on a cross. Jesus had been made a public spectacle, exposed to the jeers of all who passed by. Only a week before, their hopes had risen to fever pitch when the excited crowds welcomed their Master waving palm branches and shouting 'hosanna'. But now Jesus lay dead in a sealed tomb.

Their wishes were dashed; the dream was over! Their Savior and Messiah didn't do what they expected. Even the report of the women that Christ's tomb was empty didn't raise their spirits; it only confused them even more. The two despondent disciples walking the road to Emmaus summed up the situation very neatly

when they said, "We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free!"

Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers, it's difficult to revive. We need to note the number of people, like First Nation's youth, who take their own lives because despair and discouragement have sucked the last bit of hope out of their lives. When someone we love and care for is overtaken by a serious illness, which goes on, and on, despair sets in. It almost becomes impossible to hope for recovery. We may even be afraid to hope because we believe that we couldn't cope with another letdown.

Cleopas and his friend were saying, "We don't expect it now, but once we did. We had high hopes for the future, but now those hopes are gone and all we have left is disappointment."

Can you identify with the feelings of these two disciples in any way? For each of us the cause of feeling down might be different, but it would be a rare person indeed who could claim that they have never been affected by any of these D words or similar emotions.

But as the two walked along, a stranger joined them. This was going to be the most significant walk in their whole lives. The stranger asked them what they were discussing. And so they welcomed him and poured out their story to someone who seemed willing to listen. They told the stranger all about their hopes and their disappointments. The last thing they needed was a brisk "cheer up" talk, or being told to "snap out of it", or being lectured about hope and clear or positive thinking. Instead, the stranger simply provided a listening ear.

Please notice – this is how evangelism and hospitality occurs. The two go together. Cleopas and his friend welcomed the stranger. They explained their disappointment. The stranger walked with them, listened and asked questions as the two told their story. The two walkers are an example for us, as is the stranger. The stranger was welcomed into the

conversation. It seemed he went out of his way to meet these two persons. The two disciples shared the story of Jesus, despite their despair. The stranger chose to walk with them, engaged with them, asked questions and listened.

Isn't that a great picture – Jesus walking along the road with his despondent and confused disciples sharing their troubles? Suddenly this 2,000-year-old story is brought into the present. When disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, despair, depression and death fill our lives, Jesus is the unseen "stranger" walking alongside us, listening to us. Are we willing to hear his voice, and have eyes to see him revealing himself to us?

Then after a while, the stranger, gave the two the best Bible study ever! He used the Holy Bible, the scriptures, to explain about who Jesus is. This is another important tool of evangelism. Jesus flat out said to them, you don't understand, "You are slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"

Now I would not recommend that kind of approach in sharing our faith, until we have invested time and energy and listening with people. But at some point, we need to believe that the Bible has a message and has clout to change people's lives. To offer hope from the D words. And at some point, we need to have the courage to lead people to the Scriptures to point to Jesus and the power of God's Word.

The disciples hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel in a particular way. But they needed to hear Jesus again connect the dots as to how his vision was bigger than just Israel. We need to also, when we talk with people about Jesus.

So what do we learn about evangelism from this event? **First**, we need to be hospitable like the two disciples were.

Second, we need to be assertive like Jesus was in joining them.

Third, we need to be like Jesus and the two. We talk about our own personal and spiritual experiences. We listen. And we share how we depend on and connect with Jesus. We share how Jesus offers and provides hope. Jesus trusted that his sharing the Bible would lift their doubt.

Fourth, we need to know our Bibles. It's a common concern that Biblical illiteracy is growing, even among those who attend church. The solution – read our Bibles. Have personal, couple and family devotions. Attend Sunday School. Attend Bible studies. Churches offer a lot of good and needed things but often it's like lite beer – its Christianity lite. We simply need to do better. I'm aware that my preaching is affected by how well or how badly those listening know the Bible. And Bible study can be boring – especially if we've heard it before. But like eating – we need a steady healthy diet.

Notice what Jesus' intent was when he used the scriptures. Verse 26 and 27. “Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into glory?” “He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The whole point of the Bible is Jesus. It's not just a group of stories and some beautiful literature and great laments. Please notice the insert of a resource I came across. It gives us a helpful understanding of the Bible and Jesus. Please notice, Jesus didn't just use human logic and arguments in sharing about himself. He trusted that the authority of God's Word would make sense to Cleopas and his companion.

If you're in sales you have an elevator speech. You're supposed to make a sale in thirty seconds. “What is the Bible about?” How would we answer that? The Bible is about Jesus. It's not just a reference book. It's not only a book of examples to live up to. It's not just a to-do list. It's not only a bunch of laws. Instead, it's about Jesus. It's a single, true story with a plotline. The plotline is creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. It's

about grace. It's about rescue. It's about how Jesus saves His people. It's about how Creation's king has come to show us how to live, to invite us follow, and to redeem us.

It's not certain why Cleopas and his companion did not recognize Jesus. This is one of those difficult realities of the Bible. But here are some reasons. Maybe they were so sad their dreams were dashed that they could not consider any other possibilities. Maybe God did not want them to recognize Jesus because this gave Jesus an opportunity to teach them again so they would believe – to help them get beyond their own ideas about Jesus. God wanted them to grow in trusting Jesus – to accept God's plan for Jesus. And God wanted to strengthen their faith so the two would not just know about Jesus, but to really know Jesus. There is a difference. Isn't this the goal of all evangelism and witnessing?

As Cleopas and his friend neared their destination, they were hospitable again. They invited Jesus to stay overnight and eat with them. They strongly urged the stranger to hang around and keep the conversation going. Then finally, at the supper table, when the stranger broke the bread, the two traveler's eyes were opened! It was like they had instant healing from cataracts. They saw Jesus! Suddenly it dawned on them who the stranger was. It was their Master, Lord and Savior, raised from the dead. Does this say something about the power and importance of the Lord's Supper?

Jesus himself had ministered to them in their sadness. Now they knew why a change had come over them as they walked on the road. They knew why their hearts burned within them while Jesus talked on the road and opened up the Scriptures. They now knew why their despondent hearts had been changed to hearts filled with hope and renewed faith. Jesus had revealed himself to them in his Word, personally and through the act of Communion. That's our hope when we worship and study the Bible. That's our hope when we verbally share our faith. Jesus wants to reveal he is risen & alive.

Their lives prior to this moment were like a smoldering fire that gives no light, just smoke to cloud things up. But once they came into the presence of the Risen Lord their hearts were ablaze! A burning fire gives light for all to see, and they saw, understood and believed! All because of the Risen Lord! Jesus' victory became their restoring hope. It became the anchor of their lives overcoming the deadly "D's". Jesus' turned that sad walk into a dance of delight and eagerness that led the two to go evangelize, to share good life giving news.

And how these two persons responded. They rushed back and returned to Jerusalem at once, in the dark, to find Jesus' eleven core disciples and tell them what had happened to them. All of a sudden they became the Bible teachers. I hope we can get a sense of the excitement, joy, wonder and awe all Jesus' followers had that night, because this helps us overcome the "D's"

The church is the same way. We come here week after week, sharing the news that Jesus is with us. Telling one another about walking on the road with him or seeing him again for the first time. We strengthen one another when we look around and really see what is happening around us. We strengthen the church when we look around for Jesus. When we look at the world through Jesus' eyes, we find that we can not help but see him all around us. And then we find that we can't keep it to ourselves anymore. As Jesus opens our eyes we are moved to share.

Jesus wants to take people that are unbelieving, sad, discouraged and rebellious sinners and turn them into followers. He takes us from brokenness & discouragement to joy & hope. And he wants our help to do this work. God is moving in this world and we see in this story the grand story of Scripture, leading us to Jesus. God doesn't want anyone to miss seeing Jesus. And he trusts us to help tell his message. As we walk on our Emmaus roads may we dare to turn to those who are walking beside us and near us and see the light of Christ that is in them and help open their eyes to see Jesus. Amen.

John Calvin, one of the reformers said, "This is what we should, in short, seek in the whole of Scripture - truly to know Jesus Christ and the infinite riches that are comprised in Him and are offered to us by Him from God the Father. If one were to sift thoroughly the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament, he would not find a single word mentioned which would not draw and bring us to Jesus."