

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Luke 24:13-35, “With Eyes Wide Open”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 4/30/2017**

Well, this is our third week of reflecting on the resurrection of Jesus.

And it’s not just because my mom never got me an Easter bunny as a kid.

In fact, thinking back on it, I think I got pretty decent Easter candy,  
so this extended reflection on Easter isn’t a result  
of any repressed childhood issues on my part.

(At least none that I’m aware of!)

The real reason is that the season of Easter (technically called “Eastertide”)  
goes on for 50 days until we get to Pentecost.

And so the Lectionary passages

linger around the empty tomb for a bit.

And that’s nice, because it’s hard to focus on the resurrection

when you’re worrying about how the egg hunt will go,

how your ham is coming along at home,

or how your Easter hat is fitting.

(I actually don’t remember seeing any Easter hats this year...were there some?)

On Easter Sunday we looked at the first half of John 20,

where Mary Magdalene encounters an empty tomb, some angels in white,

and a man who she at first thinks is the gardener,

but then realizes is Jesus when he speaks her name.

Last week we looked at the second half of John 20,

where Jesus appears to the disciples within a locked room

on two different occasions. I noted that in John, “seeing is believing,”

but even in our highly image conscious society

it’s better still to not see, and yet believe.

Today we move to Luke 24,

and a story that has become known as the Road to Emmaus.

The story takes place in the midst of the depression and confusion that fell upon the disciples following the death of Jesus.

Jesus had, in fact, risen from the dead that very morning.

The news had been reported to the disciples but in Luke's account, they had not yet seen the Risen Christ.

Two of them who were walking a seven-mile road to a village called Emmaus.

I've always assumed these disciples were both men, but we learn later in the story that one of them is Cleopas.

Cleopas was not one of the 12 disciples,

so there's no reason to think his companion was, either.

In fact, it's quite possible that Cleopas was walking the road with his wife. John 19:25 indicates that among those standing by the cross of Jesus were four people:

his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene."

If this is the same Cleopas,

it would make sense that he walked the road with his wife, Mary.

While walking, they meet a stranger on the road.

You never know what will happen when you entertain strangers.

In this case, the disciples think he's a stranger, but this man on the road is, in fact, their friend, rabbi, and Lord: Jesus of Nazareth.

But according to v. 16, "they were kept from recognizing him."

They were kept from recognizing him. Why?

Why would God prevent these disciples from seeing the one person they needed to see?

Why not reveal Jesus to them immediately?

I believe Jesus' identity was hidden from these disciples,

and their encounter is told in such detail primarily because

there is a deep truth revealed in this encounter

that God wanted to share not only with the disciples,

but with the church they would help establish.

In verses 17 – 24 they answer Jesus' questions about himself.

Could you imagine?

This is like the worst, "He's standing behind me, isn't he" moment in the history of the world.

They tell Jesus that Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet, powerful in word and deed.

That the priests and rulers handed him over, and he was crucified.

So far, so good!

But in v. 21 they say, **"we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."**

Implication? Jesus had failed to do this due to his death three days earlier.

They thought Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

This is the theme that the gospel of Luke begins with in reflecting on Jesus' birth:

In chapter 2 when Jesus presented in the Temple, Simeon says,

**"My eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."**

And the prophet Anna saw Jesus and **"gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."**

These folks on the road with the unrecognized Christ also report that some women from their community had found his tomb empty, and were told by angels that he was alive, but that none of the men had seen him alive.

Their account shows that these disciples were seeing the world  
with their spiritual eyes only half way open.

They still didn't recognize what the cross meant,  
and they still didn't know  
what these reports of resurrection meant.

Standing now a bit less than 2,000 years from these events,  
it's very easy for us to do the same thing.

We can have our understanding clouded by worry, anxiety,  
confusion, fear, desires, and other claims on our loyalty.

All these things prevent us from seeing and engaging the world  
as citizens of God's Kingdom.

Then come verses 25 - 27.

These verses reveal the reason why Jesus' identity had been hidden:

**“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe  
all that the prophets have spoken!”** the stranger exclaims.

Then beginning with Moses (that is the first five books of the Bible),  
and all the Prophets, he explained to them  
what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Jesus had a seven-mile sermon ready for them. That's a long sermon.  
I'm not anywhere near Jesus' level,  
so I just give one or one-and-a-half-mile sermons.

Jesus wanted to reveal himself through the Scriptures rather than visual perception,  
because when he was gone, the church would need to be able to identify  
Jesus in some other way than pointing at him.

Wouldn't you love to listen in on that conversation?  
What passages were most important to Jesus?  
What insights would he have shared?  
Wouldn't you love to know what Jesus taught them?

Merry Christmas everyone: the New Testament is the fruit of that conversation and all the others that the Spirit of God instigated along the way as Jesus fulfilled his promise to lead the disciples into all truth.

The teachings of Jesus himself about himself through the Hebrew Bible are the basis for what we find on the pages of the New Testament.

In v. 30, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them – the precise pattern Jesus had previously used when he gave them the Lord’s Supper. At this time, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Turning to each other, they said,  
**“Were not our hearts burning within us  
while he talked with us on the road,  
and opened the Scriptures to us?”**

Their eyes were opened, but Jesus disappeared from their sight.

What does all of this mean for us?

They began a journey of faith with their eyes wide open to who Jesus was.

This is similar, isn’t it, to the encouragement of Jesus we heard last week that we are blessed when we do not see, and yet believe?

What does an eyes wide open faith look like?

1) Eyes wide open faith recognizes and submits to the movement of the Spirit

While they were walking, these disciples later confide, their “hearts were burning within them.”

I take that to mean that the Spirit of God  
was pointing them toward the truth of what they were hearing,  
and urging them to invite this stranger to join them for the night,  
rather than keep on heading down the road.

This happened even though they had not yet been filled  
with the Spirit at Pentecost.

We who come to faith after Pentecost are given the abiding presence of the Spirit  
which joins us with Christ, and – unless we obscure it –  
opens our eyes to the way things really are in the world.

2) Eyes wide open faith identifies God's seemingly upside-down way of winning

These disciples saw Jesus death as defeat.

We cloud our spiritual vision when we accept this worldly perspective:

That head counts and dollar counts are indicators of success.

That our purpose is institutional growth and survival.

That there comes a time when we have given enough

to God and God's mission in the world,

and after that point we can live for our own benefit.

This perspective on life misses the whole point of the cross.

The cross shows that the way of salvation is total surrender  
of our entire selves to God, even to death.

When we have faith in Jesus, we have faith

in this seemingly upside-down way of winning.

Jesus calls us to take up our own cross and follow him.

Self-giving love through Christ is the way to escape  
the domination system of the world.

Eyes wide open faith pursues self-giving love as much as possible,  
not as little as needed.

### 3) Eyes wide open faith sees the centrality of the Lord's Table

After the their hearts were stirred, and he showed them  
God's upside-down way of winning,  
Jesus was finally revealed to them in the pattern of giving thanks,  
breaking bread, and giving it to them.

This is an indication of just how central this meal is in understanding the life,  
death, and resurrection of Jesus.

But it also shows how it brings us into connection  
with the presence of Jesus while he is physically absent.

Molly Marshall suggests that "Luke provides a key bridge  
for understanding divine presence as seeming 'absence.'  
Christ 'vanished out of their sight' as an indication  
that visible apprehension could not sustain enduring faith;  
holy presence would remain,  
but not in the form they had known."

We'll have some more time to investigate this some more  
during our Worship Vitality grant beginning this Summer.

### 4) It looks for the face of Jesus in strangers

When we have our spiritual eyes only half-way open,  
we don't look for Jesus in people who are different from us.

We only look for Jesus in the mirror.

We want Jesus to look like us and act like us.

But this entire Emmaus Road encounter was made possible  
because these disciples received a stranger into their conversation,  
and into their home.

Where has God's grace led you, and our church into eyes wide open faith?

Where has fear, anxiety, boredom, apathy, and self-focus

let you, and our church into life with our eyes half-shut?

It's never too late. The Spirit is calling me, and you.

There is more available for us in Kingdom life than we know.