

From Gloominess to Joy
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; Luke 24:13-35

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The Second Sunday after Easter

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Many of you have been on a Walk to Emmaus. If you're not familiar with the Walk to Emmaus, it's a three-day adult retreat sponsored by the United Methodists. I went on my walk about twenty-two years ago. It was in Shelby County, and I found it to be very meaningful. This story from Luke 24 is the model for the Walk to Emmaus. It is a strange story, in a way, recorded only by Luke. It was still Easter Sunday, Luke says. Two disciples, one of whom was named Cleopas, left Jerusalem to walk to the village of Emmaus. It was a journey of about seven miles. At some point in their journey, Luke says that Jesus joined them. It was Jesus, but Luke says that their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Cleopas and his friend were talking about all the things that had just happened in Jerusalem, and Jesus innocently asked, "What things? They couldn't believe that this stranger didn't know what had just happened. It would be like someone today asking, "What virus?"

The miracle of this text occurred when they arrived in Emmaus. It was late evening on Easter Sunday. They stopped for the evening, and Luke says that the two disciples prevailed upon this unknown traveler to stay and have dinner with them. Look at what happens. Luke says that Jesus *took* the bread, *broke* and *blessed* it, and *gave* it to them. Those four verbs drive this story: took, broke, blessed, and gave. Sound familiar? They had just heard those words Thursday night in the upper room. When they experienced this sacramental act, Luke says that their eyes were opened. They recognized the stranger who sat before them, the one with whom they shared their bread. He was Jesus their Lord; he was alive. And suddenly they were too, in a way they never had been.

Now here's the strange part. Luke says that Jesus then vanished. He was gone. They recognized him and he just vanished. Cleopas and the other disciple began to remember then how their hearts burned within them as Jesus talked with them on the road to Emmaus. Luke says that this experience was so power that

these two disciples were transformed from sad, gloomy disciples, running away to Emmaus, to ecstatic evangelists telling the world about the risen Lord.

I think a lot of us could benefit from a walk to Emmaus experience these days, couldn't we? This pandemic and the shutdown are weighing heavily physically and emotionally. I appreciated Carl Malm's articles this past week about grief. He named what I've been feeling. I didn't recognize it as grief, but I think it was. So this story comes at a good time. It opens our eyes to the beauty of Easter. Yes, we're still surrounded by horrible news, but we are buoyed by a message of hope and new life. Let us "see" that our lives are grounded in that message.

Most of you have not gotten to meet our intern, Melinda Sparks. She is off to a very good start, and she has agreed to join me in the sermon dialogue today. Good morning, Melinda. How are you coping with the stress of the pandemic and shut down?

The text describes the two disciples as sad. The Greek word that is used there could be translated as "gloomy." This pandemic has caused some gloominess in me. Have you experienced any gloominess or seen it in others?

What I find ironic about this story is this: Jesus was with them, but they didn't know it. The source of New Life was in their midst, but their eyes were closed to it. I find that to be a powerful parable for today. That can happen to us. The source of New Life is in our midst, but it is hard for us to see with all the bad news. How do you tap into the good news in the midst of so much bad news?

The change in those disciples was dramatic. "That same hour" they got up and went back to Jerusalem, another seven-mile walk. Their gloominess was transformed into joy as they rejoined the other disciples. Melinda, what guidance can you give our congregation about rediscovering a sense of joy?

I want to remind you today that it's still Easter. Our living cross is still decorated. I know how tempting it is to give in to gloominess. I feel it too. Let us resist that temptation and hear the call of Easter instead. Weatherly folks, he is risen! He is risen indeed! Let us live in the joy of Easter.