

Sermon
April 19, 2020

Covenant Presbyterian Church
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The Emmaus Journey
Luke 24:13-35

The Road to Emmaus story is one of the most well known and beloved stories of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The setting is that first Easter day presumably in the afternoon. The two walking on the road to Emmaus were on their way home from Jerusalem. It was not a long journey - about seven miles. That is about the distance from the church to Kennestone Hospital down Canton Road to the south or to downtown Woodstock to the North or to Roswell Road down Piedmont to the East or to Highway 41 or maybe Old 41 on Barrett Parkway to the West. We would say they lived in the neighborhood and were walking home. It took them longer than it would take us to drive that distance but it was not far for them to walk in that day.

On their way home - home from the Temple and Jerusalem - Jesus met them on the road. Once they arrived at their destination they invited Jesus into their homes. It was there in their homes that they recognized Jesus. They were changed by that encounter. Their sadness and distress turned to joy.

Reflecting on this story I began to wonder. How will we be changed by what we have experienced during this pandemic? What have we learned along the way - on our Emmaus journey - that led us to our homes? Have we encountered Jesus as we have sheltered in place? How might our experiences at home influence our actions in the future as individuals and as the church of Jesus Christ?

One of the things God has been teaching me profoundly is how important physical touching is to my life. Being a widow and living alone being quarantined at home means I have not touched another human being since this began. I miss it. Most of you know that I am a big hugger and I miss

your hugs. Talking with my son's family on Easter my daughter in law commented how strange it was not to be able to give me a big hug and to be with me on Easter. She promised that when this is all over there would be a great big hug waiting for me. My daughter sent me an Easter card last week. In it was a gift from my youngest granddaughter who is almost 7. It was a life size drawing of herself folded up in the card. I want to share it with you because it is precious. (Show drawing.) My daughter told me she lay down on the floor and they traced her body. What I noticed was how long the arms seem - but they are life size. The note on the card told me she was sending me a giant hug. And friends it brought a great big smile to my face and reminded me of what a wonderful hugger she is and how important those long arms are for a good hug! Yes, we are in need of human touch and that is one of the things we are told to refrain from in this time. It is hard.

When Jesus sat at table with these disciples it was at the moment that he shared the bread with them that they recognized him. It was when he reached out offering them something tangible that required them to reach toward him to receive it that their eyes were opened. It was his physical presence with them sitting side by side at a meal and sharing bread together that provided their revelation. Physical touch and physical presence - one person reaching out to another human being - is a powerful way we show that we care for one another. I for one will never take it for granted again. For I miss it greatly. It is one of the reasons why gathering together in worship weekly is so important to the community of faith. Phone calls are ok and at least we have Facetime and Zoom to see one another now as well but it is by being in the physical presence of another that we really come to know one another and are bonded in powerful ways.

Hearing this story always reminds us of the power of remembering also. In the midst of this pandemic Facebook reminded us that one day recently was National Sibling Day. Since so many people are at home it seemed to send people to old pictures looking for the best pictures of their

families of birth. Many comments about the occasions reminded us of the power of memories. Another invitation was to find your high school senior picture in honor of the seniors this year who will not be able to experience so much that all of us did in our last years in high school or college. Although we are now being told that scammers are using that information and you should take those pictures down that exercise caused many to remember those days and the people they shared them with. Remembering is important.

Cleopas remembered and shared the story of what had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem with their companion on the Emmaus journey. In turn, Jesus shared memories of stories throughout scripture that had pointed to the events that had taken place seeking to jog their memories of what had been foretold. As he shared those memories Jesus said *“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”* The way this question is asked implies a yes answer. It was necessary for the Messiah to suffer for us - a memory that causes us to pause. One of the powerful things that happens when we remember is that we begin to understand how God has used those events to shape and mold us. It was Christ’s willingness to suffer for us that makes his crucifixion and resurrection so powerful to us years later. For it is his sacrifice for us that revealed the depth of God’s love for us.

I wonder how our memories of this time in the midst of a pandemic will shape and mold our futures? Will we remember how important family and friends are? How precious our loved ones are that live in nursing homes and how our regular presence with them matters? How important it is to take time to share meals with loved ones and to be in their presence? Will we remember the gift we have been given of time with our nuclear family and time to slow down and remember what really matters? Will we cherish the ability to be in the physical presence of those we love and make more effort to make that happen in the future?

Will we remember that every worker in our country matters? That we depend not only on our leaders who make policy or on our own network of friends and family but on the farmer who grows the crops, the migrant worker who harvests the crops, the truck drivers who deliver the goods, the food processing plants that process the food, the companies that package our food and paper goods, the store clerks who order the food, stock the shelves and sell it to us. Every one of them matters to our way of life. And may we not forget how much we miss the restaurants that cook our preferred food so we don't have to cook every meal ourselves and the servers who serve it to us with smiles on their faces. And so many others who provide us with services that bless our lives.

Will we remember how important our physical health is and take it seriously in the future? Will we remember to be grateful for our health care workers, for the researchers and doctors that seek cures for diseases? Will we be more gracious and caring as we interact with them in the future?

Friends, we take so much for granted in our world. The disciples took Jesus' presence for granted until he suffered and died for them. Was it necessary that we too suffer so that we would remember that we need one another? And that every worker represents a family that needs others to survive. We need one another! May our memories open our eyes as they did for these disciples.

There is much talk within church circles wondering what the future holds for the church of Jesus Christ - post pandemic. How will this pandemic change the way we gather and the things that matter to us in the church? And the ultimate question - will people come back to the Sanctuary now that they know they can worship on line? After Jesus disappeared these travelers had a revelation. Their hearts burned for they understood some things in new ways. What they learned caused them to immediately get up and head back to Jerusalem. They could not contain themselves. Why? Because they needed to share what they had experienced with others in their community of faith. Notice that once they arrived they found the eleven and others gathered in community. There was a

community to return to - the faithful were present and telling their stories. They too had encountered the living Jesus. For friends, Jesus was not just on the road to Emmaus away from Jerusalem but he was in every home, every gathering of his disciples revealing and comforting them wherever they were. Jesus is present in each of our homes this day and he has much to teach us in the midst of this experience. Notice that only after these disciples listened to the stories of those gathered did they share their encounter for they valued what everyone had experienced and found joy in sharing.

We too friends, when this pandemic is over, will find joy and comfort as we come together to touch, to remember and to be community again. For it is as we gather that we will be strengthened. This week I read a powerful sentence: “The Emmaus Walk is the journey that walked the disciple-community into its new identity as the body of Christ.” In the same way our Emmaus Journey is the journey that will lead us into a new identity as the body of Christ. I can’t wait to see who we become.

For friends, we will never be the same again. We will be made new and that new identity as the body of Christ post pandemic has the power to change the world just as the disciples sharing on that first Easter day changed the world forever....