

## Luke 24:13-35

Would you recognize Jesus if you saw Him? These men did not. It wasn't a passing glance either. They were with Jesus for two or three hours. They knew what Jesus looked like. They were part of the company of His disciples. But when He came up to join them in their journey to Emmaus, they did not cry out: "Jesus! It's You!" They thought only that He was a visitor who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover.

Now to be fair to these men, we're told that their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus. This was an act of God. The entire journey toward Emmaus was to be undertaken with these two men assuming that they were speaking with a complete stranger.

Interesting. Why do you suppose God did that? Was He, perhaps, having fun with them? But considering their heavy hearts filled with sadness, this would be a bit cruel on the part of God. Was this not done out of love? Love for these men and love for you and me. Think about how different this narrative would be had these two men recognized Jesus immediately. Their sadness would have left them right away. Wouldn't this be a good thing? No. We learn differently when we are sad and afflicted than we do when our spirits are lifted.

These two men were scraping the bottom of the barrel, so to speak. Their hopes were dashed. The one they believed would redeem Israel had been crucified. How could He lead God's people against Caesar when He Himself couldn't even defeat Pontius Pilate? The path they were hoping would lead them to victory turned out to be a dead end.

But this had to be, for they were on the wrong path. They saw Jesus as an earthly, physical Messiah; one who would restore the nation of Israel; who would throw off the rule of Rome over them. An earthly Savior dare not be taken captive by the enemy. How can He lead His people to victory when He is captured and even crucified?

These two men needed to be set straight, and this Jesus would do. "*O foolish ones!*" Jesus says to these two men, "*and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.*" And beginning with the Book of Genesis, Jesus for the next two hours or so, taught them that the Christ had to suffer and be crucified, and that He had to rise again on the third day, and that in this way, God would redeem Israel and all sinners from enemies more powerful than Rome: sin, death, and hell.

We are no different from these two men...in this: our eyes are kept from recognizing Jesus so that we, like them, find ourselves scraping the bottom of the barrel. Unless our hopes are dashed, we will not see Jesus in the proper way, but we, like these two men, will think of Him as merely a visitor, a stranger even.

Let me explain. Jesus is here walking with us on our Emmaus road. He is clearly seen in His words of absolution that your pastor is commanded to speak to you. But you will not recognize Him in these words unless your hearts are heavy with sadness over your sinful life. If any of us does not have sorrow over our sins, and sees little need, therefore, to confess our sins with the congregation, we will not recognize Jesus in His words of forgiveness, but we will see only a man in a white robe - a stranger...at most, a visitor here - talking some words to us.

Jesus is here with us in the bread and wine of the Sacrament, but you and I will be prevented from seeing Him unless we come up as sinners grieved in our hearts that we have offended God by how we have lived. If we do not come up to the altar with repentant hearts, we will be kept from recognizing the Risen Savior here for us.

A sinner who is not grieved over his sinful life has hope apart from the Crucified and Risen Lord. This false hope must be dashed or you and I will walk our entire life on the wrong path. God, therefore, must keep afflicting us. He must temper our successes in life with defeats, even with grief. You and I simply will not learn from the top of the heap. We must walk the valley on the sad road to Emmaus if we are to recognize Jesus. Only through suffering and affliction did He enter into glory, and the same is true for us.

God did not allow these two men to recognize Jesus with their eyes. Instead, He wanted them to recognize Jesus with their ears. From now on, after Easter, Jesus would be seen only through the hearing of His Word. This Emmaus road narrative sets the pattern for us. Through hearing we believe. Through our ears we see Jesus, not through our eyes. As soon as these two men knew it was Jesus, in the breaking of the bread, He vanished from their sight. But He was willing to walk with them throughout their entire journey when His words were being spoken into their ears.

So many people today are asking, "Where is God?" The problem is that they are using their eyes and not their ears. These two men had hearts burning within them as Jesus spoke to them on the road. The Holy Spirit was working in their hearts. He was tossing the garbage out and filling them with the truth. All this was happening, but only through their ears.

If you want to see Jesus, open your ears when you are here in church. The same Jesus is here with you who was with the two men on the road. You will not feel your hearts burning here just as they did not until later. But you will be learning. You will be growing in faith and understanding. The Holy Spirit will be tossing the garbage out and filling you with the truth, and the truth is Christ. So when you open your ears to the words of Christ, He fills you and blesses you in marvelous ways.

In a certain way you and I can see ourselves on the Emmaus road every single day of our life. And when we reach our final destination - Emmaus, where we sit at table with Jesus in the courts of heaven - our eyes will then be opened, but not until then.

What this means is that every day as we journey, we deal with sadness, we face trials, we have doubts, we become overwhelmed with grief. This is life on the Emmaus road. But look with me and see what Jesus does. He does not let these two men face their grief alone. Right away in their journey He comes to them. And just so, Jesus draws near to you, especially in your sadness, in your afflictions, when your hearts are heavy. He never allows His grieving children to walk alone. He who joined you in the water of Baptism journeys with you every day on the Emmaus road.

Does He, at times, scold you for your lack of faith as He did these two men? Most certainly, for we need reproving - all of us do. But most of all, He draws near to you to forgive you; to forgive you for your slowness of heart to believe. We walk on the Emmaus road as poor sinners struggling with life. But He died and rose again for you. He keeps speaking His words into your ears. His words keep you in His love. His words cleanse you of sin. Jesus keeps moving you toward Emmaus where He will open your eyes to His glory. But until that day, He abides with you here so that you will abide with Him forever in heaven. Amen.