

It's in the Sharing...
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Luke 24:13-35 (CEB)

13 On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. 15 While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. 16 They were prevented from recognizing him. 17 He said to them, "What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stopped, their faces downcast. 18 The one named Cleopas replied, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?"

19 He said to them, "What things?" They said to him, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. 20 But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. 21 We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. 22 But there's more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 and didn't find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn't see him."

25 Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. 26 Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.

28 When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. 29 But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"

33 They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying to each other, "The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!" 35 Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

In last week's gospel reading from John, the first half of the reading took place on Sunday midday, following the morning of the resurrection – the *first* Easter Sunday. We were with disciples, hiding behind locked doors, when Jesus mysteriously appeared to them. In the second half of the reading, a week had passed and the disciples were still in the house, but Thomas had joined them...and we heard of Thomas' encounter with Jesus.

In today's reading from the gospel of Luke, we return to that *first* Easter Sunday... Sunday midday. It's the same time as in John's gospel, but we're in a different place. When we think of disciples, we tend to think only of the Twelve, though they, strictly speaking, were apostles. The terms "apostle" and "disciple" are often used interchangeably, to be sure, but what we are seeing in this event on the way to Emmaus is that it was not only the Twelve who followed Jesus virtually every step of his ministry.

We are on the road to Emmaus; not hiding behind locked doors but heading out of town – away from Jerusalem. We're with Cleopas and an un-named, unknown other ---- one who could very well represent each and every follower of Christ, then and now. They had received Jesus' teaching. Like Mary, they had sat at his feet. Perhaps there had been times when they spoke to him face to face.

These two disciples are walking back home and talking about the news of the day; about the things that they've witnessed or heard...

Cleopas: Empty! Empty? They found the tomb empty!

Other: And angels – she said she saw angels ... who spoke to her.

Cleopas: I just don't know ...

Other: So, what do you think will happen now?

Cleopas: With Jesus' gone? Things are going to get bad.

Other: What hope is there to for us? For Israel? Who can beat the empire now?

Then a stranger appeared; a man they didn't recognize. It's not quite enough simply to say that they "didn't recognize him." What the scripture tells us is that "... their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Their eyes were kept from recognizing him — that passive voice gives pause. "... [T]heir eyes were kept from recognizing" Jesus, whom they had left everything to follow, perhaps as long as three years ago. What keeps them, what prevents them, from recognizing Jesus?

In the Greek the word is KRATEO. This should sound familiar because it was a word that was used in John's gospel last week and I talked about it. In John's gospel, Jesus commissioned the disciples to go out to forgive sins and remind people that God has seized hold of their sins. In today's scripture, the Greek says that their eyes were seized/held from seeing him.

With our translation of the word into English as *prevented*, it leads us to naturally ask questions about WHO or WHAT prevented them from seeing....

- Is it that Luke just doesn't know for sure? He's heard the story, heard how they didn't recognize him, can't for the life of him figure out why, but there it is?
- Is it that God, through the Holy Spirit, actively and deliberately prevents their recognition, because, for reasons known only to God, the time for recognition is not yet right? Some additional ground has to be covered first — a proper understanding of scripture and perhaps something beyond that?
- Is it that Jesus' appearance has changed as a result of his recent ... "ordeal," to say the least?
- Is it their own narrowed vision that keeps them from seeing clearly, that prevents their recognition? Is it that their minds are just not able to grasp the idea — the reality, in this case — of resurrection from the dead?
 - Or it contradicts their idea of redemption? Their idea of Jesus redeeming Israel did not reconcile with their leader, their warrior, their "king," ACTUALLY dying, despite what Jesus had said.
- Is it perhaps that they were experiencing such grief and shock over Jesus' crucifixion that it seized a hold of their eyesight? Being so emotionally or psychologically overwhelmed, they were unable to see the truth before them.

This stranger that appears, seems to appear out of nowhere. Just like John's gospel, Jesus is just there; suddenly and mysteriously he is alongside these two disciples and we don't know how they came to be together. He begins walking with them and the first thing he says is, "What are you talking about?"

The stranger wants to know the news of the day. What's the word? **The word! The Buzz!** What happening around here? --- Having been through what they've been through, witnessing their beloved teacher crucified, it's no surprise to us that Cleopas responds, "Are you kidding me? Don't you know what's happened? Are you oblivious to the things that have transpired?"

The disciples then make sure the stranger is made aware of all that they know:

- Our teacher Jesus of Nazareth – his deeds, his lessons – he was a prophet of God!
- Our leaders let him be killed. They crucified him three days ago.
- Our hopes are now dashed – we are distraught - Jesus was to have redeemed all of Israel.
- Our friends, some women in our group say that just this morning they went to the tomb where he was buried, and he's now gone. We're astonished! He's gone!

The stranger has heard them. What is his response to them? “You idiots!” The Greek word is anoetoi, which translates as “without minds.” It’s often found in most biblical translations at “foolish,” but there are several commentaries out there that tell it like it is and I tend to agree.

This stranger calls them idiots. And why? Because he’s right when he says that their dull minds are holding them back. The stranger reviews common sense with them and everything that they already know.

- All that they’ve experienced as disciples of Jesus. YOU were with Jesus. HE told you of these things.
- The PROPHETS foretold of these events. The wise and knowledgeable experts of your forebearers shared with you what they knew.
- Even your own disciples, the women who were AT THE TOMB, told you these things....and yet you won’t believe!
- WHO will you believe?
- WHAT will you believe?
- How much evidence must be presented to you? How much history must you be told? What will it take for you to understand IN SPITE OF YOURSELVES?

Two thousand years later, we read the scriptures – we read these very words and think, “how could they be so incredulous.” We can hear Jesus’ frustratingly screaming at them, “What do I have to do, hit you over the head with a brick to get you to understand?”

It may have seemed or felt like it would take a brick over the head, but we see in the rest of the passage, that all it took was the sharing of a meal.

When Cleopas and the other disciple reached their home in Emmaus, the stranger was prepared to continue on. Their care and concern for the stranger, lead them to open their home to him. It’s getting late. The sun is setting. Please, stay with us. The stranger does so. They the recline to share a meal. The stranger blessed the bread, broke it and handed it to them. They took the bread and THEN they recognized Jesus. And just like that, Jesus disappeared. Then they realized!

Their hearts were so on fire with the word and what they had just experienced that they immediately returned to Jerusalem. It didn’t matter that it was getting late. It didn’t matter that they would be returning while it was dark and far more dangerous. It didn’t matter that they’d already been traveling for many, many hours already and were likely very tired. Hearing the Word! Being in the presence of Jesus! They had to share that with their fellow disciples back in Jerusalem. So, they got up and went. To heck with sleep, the hour of the night or the long journey – this is the good news!

Jesus takes us by the hand on our road, he explains to us the scriptures, and he says to us: I am present in the scriptures, if you listen to the Word of God, your heart will burn on account of my presence. He offers to us the eucharistic banquet: the bread broken during the meal opens your eyes and makes you capable of recognizing that I am present. And then Jesus reminds us of his presence in the community of brothers and sisters. The risen Jesus makes himself present among us today as well. His true face is there.

What is the news of the day?
What is THE WORD that you hear?
To whom will you listen?
How will you care for the strangers?
Is your heart on fire?

The road that awaits us from that day without end, the day of Jesus' resurrection, is a road of faith in Christ's suffering and conquering, about whom the scriptures speak. We learn that it is a pilgrimage of hope and of expectation of his return, so that he may take us with him, that it is a pilgrimage of charity that removes the ashes and reignites the fire that every person created in the image and likeness of God harbors in his or her own heart.

And in this life pilgrimage, the Christian must be able and ready to listen to the voice of the other. "What needs to be done is to walk together, to be able to transform the transit into a dwelling. This is the profound and hidden meaning of the story of Emmaus: ... what happens here is not the revelation of Jesus as God or of God in Jesus, but the reciprocal meeting of persons in the discovery of the common fragility. In ... the "sharing," people reciprocally show confidence. We are strangers on earth. The goal is not important, but rather the staying on the journey. Being able to walk together. It is also necessary to know how to pause for a stop: to render oneself a support for others."¹

Jesus stays as long as we need him. He does what needs to be done and leaves. For the disciples THEN... Jesus left because it was now their turn to pick up the mantle and spread the good news. Our comfort is knowing that Jesus will appear and speak to us whenever needed, but probably not in the ways we want or expect. What we see and hear... When we see and hear it ... All becomes clear when we make room for the Risen Christ and when we do it in community and with compassionate love.

AMEN.

¹ Dotti, Guido. "Pilgrimage to Emmaus." www.oikoumene.org