

“Road Trip”
Luke 24:13-35
April 30, 2017
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

In the summer of 1979, I bought my first car. I was in college and had decided to stay in Spokane for the summer rather than return to Boulder. I was working part-time as a janitor at Sears from 6-10 every morning but then I needed to hitchhike out to my other job. I quickly learned that wasn't going to work long term, but a friend wanted to sell her car, so as soon as I had saved up the \$300, I bought my first car. A 1970 Pontiac Tempest. 2 doors. Light green. Complete with an AM radio and 8track tape player. I'd probably think that it was a real junker now, but then I was so excited to have it. Because having a car meant one thing: Freedom. I wasn't stuck on campus. I could head into town anytime I wanted and at opportune times during the year there was the opportunity for a Road Trip. Loved Road Trips. Those happened when we just wanted to get away. We might drive the six hours to Seattle for the weekend or to my best college buddy's parents house in Portland. We might drive to wherever the football or basketball team was playing that day. But it was nice to be able to just get away. After an especially tough exam or if one of my close friends had a difficult break-up with a significant other, one could be sure that the words “Road Trip!” would be spoken soon. Sometimes you just have to get away.

I'm sure that's how these disciples felt on that Sunday morning. They had been through a terrible time. They had known Jesus and had watched as he had been arrested, tried and put to death. Then they had to wait all that long Saturday, not able to go anywhere because it was the Sabbath. But as soon as they could on Sunday, they looked at each other and said, “Let's just get away, let's get out of here.” So they start walking to Emmaus. They take a road trip.

When everything has fallen apart, where do you go? Maybe something you had hoped for now turns out that it will never happen, what do you do? When someone you love has died, especially someone you thought you might grow old with, where can you go? You take a road trip. You go to Emmaus.

The funny thing, of course is we don't really know where Emmaus is. The story tells us that they were going to a village called Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem. Problem is that there is no village called that seven miles from Jerusalem. Some scholars think it refers to another Emmaus which is about 16 miles from Jerusalem. But could these two disciples have walked all the way to Emmaus and then turned around when it was evening and walked or ran all the way back to Jerusalem? Maybe. But it's still at least 3-4 hours to get there. So we don't really know where Emmaus is. But do we know who these two guys are? We know they are disciples and we know one of them is named Cleopas but we don't know the other one. This is the only time they are mentioned in Scripture. Just this one appearance to them by the risen Christ. And even this story is not mentioned elsewhere either. If you look in the bulletin you'll see the Affirmation of Faith that we are going to use today in a few minutes. We use these over and over again so they become familiar to us and this one is taken from I Corinthians. In the full text from I Corinthians 15, listing the appearances of the resurrected Jesus, Paul says that "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared first to the women, then to Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sister. Then he appeared to James, then to all of the apostles." Did you hear Cleopas and his companion among that list. Me neither. They weren't all that important I guess.

We never hear of Cleopas again after this passage, and we never learn the name of his companion. They are not important people. They are "ordinary" people who have had the grand adventure of following Jesus and his disciples. But now that is over, and they are walking back home.

Amy Hunter says, "With Jesus' death they have lost their faith and their hope. They are not looking for him; in fact, they don't even recognize him when he joins them. Yet he chooses this place of loss to meet them. When he asks about their sorrow, they are so absorbed in that grief that they cannot believe that this person doesn't know about their experience. They tell Jesus the story of his own ministry and

death, and add the dubious news of his resurrection.

“For them the story is over. Their hopes have proven empty, and they are defeated. But then Jesus tells the story back to them, this time through the lens of their own faith tradition and scriptures. "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe. . ." The story is not about them and their disappointment, he says. It is about life, the universe and everything in it.

“They respond to Jesus with hospitality, engaging him in conversation and expressing concern for him when he appears to be traveling beyond their stopping point. "The day is over," they insist. "It's getting dark. Come eat with us and rest and be safe." At supper when Jesus takes, blesses, breaks and gives them the bread, they recognize him, then almost immediately lose him again as he vanishes. But the experience on the road and at table has transformed them, and they immediately return to Jerusalem to find the disciples and the rest of their group.

“What makes the story remarkable is how unremarkable it is. I can understand Jesus appearing to the remaining 11 disciples, to the faithful women who followed him, and even to Paul all very practical appearances in terms of establishing the church and its mission. But Cleopas and his companion are nobodies who have no idea what God might be doing. They could be any one of us. Their road to Emmaus is an ordinary road, the road each of us is on every day. This is what sets this story apart from other accounts of Jesus' Easter appearances.

Yes, the story resonates with a sense of the church and its mission and of the tremendous power of the word and the sacraments to connect us with the presence of God. But its image is of God and a church that walk alongside human confusion, human pain and a human loss of faith and hope. Emmaus invites us to expect God to find us. Emmaus challenges us to see that it isn't our unshakable faith and deep spirituality that connect us with the risen Christ, but our smallest gestures of hospitality and friendship.”

Amy B. Hunter, *Christian Century*, April 2, 2002

That's where Emmaus is. The everyday road trips we take, the streets we walk on. That's who these unknown disciples are. They are us. They are every disciples of Jesus who follows him in the every day. The disciples who invite the stranger in to stay because it is evening and the day is almost over. They don't know him. He is a stranger. But he's Jesus. And that's where he is to us too. He's in the stranger we see on the street. He's the checkout person at Meijer or the stock boy at WalMart. He's the refugee from Syria, he's the person who voted differently, he's the person who is upset or alone or grieving or seems just so out of place and has no clue what's been going on these days. He's the one who has suffered loss just as we have. He's the ordinary person in need of hospitality. A couple of days ago I was hurrying out of the church on my way to do a pastoral call. While I was leaving the office, there was a young woman on her way in, and she looked sort of familiar. I stopped and said, "Hello, can I help you?" And she looked around shyly and said, "Well, they told me to come here between 2:30 and 3:30." And I knew she was here for the food pantry, probably her first time, a little unsure, a bit embarrassed, wondering how she ever got to this point in her life. I smiled and said, "Welcome, we're glad you're here," or something inane like that. And quickly Julie was by my side, saying, "Did you find us ok?" and she put her arm around her shoulder and said, "Here, let me show you where to go." And she led her toward the pantry where there would be a volunteer ready to welcome her as a guest and make her feel as at home as possible. And I walked out the door, thinking to myself, where do I know her from, she looks familiar. And then, of course it hit me, she's Jesus. The stranger on the road. Jesus is the food pantry guest we put our arm around and show her the way where someone is waiting to welcome her, to help her, to be blessed by her presence. This is Emmaus. And Jesus is here.