

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

The Road to Recognition

Sermon Reflection Notes

Today we heard the story of the Road to Emmaus, but Pastor Ron began with a couple of other scriptures the Emmaus story always bring to mind for him. The first was the story of Jacob who had run away from his brother. While asleep, Jacob had a dream where God reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant, and in the background, angels are going up and down a ladder. Upon waking, Jacob says: "The Lord was in this place, and I did not know it." The second scripture was from the book of Hebrews when the preacher says: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." How many times in our lives have we looked back at our lives only to discover that we did not notice the work of God surrounding us? Or did we fail to realize in the moment we were entertaining angels and only realized later on?

Usually, it is the adults who say: "The Lord was in this place, and I did not know it." Kids won't miss it. They see the beauty in things we miss—the holiness and wonder in things we look past or don't see at all. The scripture for today is an example of just such a moment. We have two disciples we know almost nothing about; they are walking along a road, sad and disappointed. They've been through a traumatic event. They dared to love Jesus, and then they saw his body tortured and killed. Now there are strange rumors of stones being rolled away and angels and an empty tomb. They are distraught and probably thinking: "Did we bet our lives on the wrong Messiah? Did we leave our jobs and our families and friends and go all in for the wrong Messiah?"

And then Jesus shows up on his two resurrected legs and works his way into the conversation. But they don't recognize him! They question how this guy who appeared on the road with them can be so out of touch that he doesn't know what has happened over the last few days and then proceed to tell the story of Jesus, the prophet, who did powerful and wondrous miracles and died at the hands of the religious and political leaders...to Jesus. Oh, the irony. And then the disciples say: "We had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel."

Hope is a funny thing. The eyes of the disciples were distorted that day, preventing them from recognizing the resurrected Jesus, but it's possible our hope can become distorted too. Pastor Ron has a friend who once said when hope becomes distorted, it becomes expectation. We expect things to go a certain way—our way. Had the disciples truly hoped Jesus would be the Messiah? Or had they expected Jesus to be the Messiah that conformed to their understanding of what a messiah was going to be? The reality was that Jesus talked a lot about a kingdom, but he wasn't a conquering leader working to overthrow the Roman Empire and restore the kingdom of Israel. He hung out with the wrong people and told strange stories and preached about peace and love. Jesus did not live up to their expectations. But the question of the resurrection is: did Jesus live up to their hopes?

If the two disciples who followed Jesus, learned from him, even buried him, did not recognize Jesus—if they were blinded to the presence of God in their midst, what makes us think that we would recognize Jesus among us today? Is it possible that we put our own expectations of who we think a savior is on Jesus rather than seeing him as our living hope? Do we domesticate God in such a way that we fail to see him in our midst? Do we ever impose our worldview on Jesus until God becomes so domesticated that God simply approves of our thoughts, our words, our actions?

We in America have a long history of seeing ourselves as a kind of messiah figure. We see ourselves and our nation as a constructive force, helping others, showing the way, a 'shining light on a hill' even. Jesus never had much time for the political power players of his day, and Jesus will certainly not conform to our expectations. The notion that our way of thinking is God's way of thinking is one

that runs deep. But does our tendency to see *ourselves* as God's method for saving the world prevent us from recognizing Jesus, who may be hiding in plain sight or walking next to us?

The disciples didn't stay oblivious to the presence of Jesus though. As evening approached, Cleopas invited Jesus to dinner, insisted upon it in fact. When Jesus was at the table with these friends, "he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples." Those verbs...we've heard them before: takes, blesses, breaks, gives. And that is when the disciples' eyes are opened. That is when they knew Jesus was in their midst. And Jesus vanished. The disciples acknowledged that something was burning in their hearts when Jesus was on the road talking about scripture, but it was the breaking bread that fully opened their eyes. That's why Methodists worship with a service of word and table. When the two are combined, beautiful things happen. Each time we gather at the table and break the bread—each time we take, bless, break and give bread to one another—Christ is mysteriously present with us. We are one with him and one with each other because of him. The table is a place we yearn for, where we expect to welcome the stranger and even angels. It is at the table that the Lord meets us. Not the God who conforms to our expectations, but the one who gives hope to the poor, the outsider, and the marginalized.

Scripture

Luke 24: 13-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Ron suggested that when hope gets distorted, it become expectation. How are hope and expectation alike? How are they different?
2. In the sermon, it was stated that if Jesus agrees with your political views, prefers your worship style, speaks your language, or has your color of skin—most likely you have created God in your own image. Where have you experienced examples of this in yourself or in others?
3. What might it mean to 'domesticate' God?
4. What does it mean that we, as United Methodists, believe that the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist) is a means of grace? What are we learning when we come to the table?
5. This sermon contained two ideas: one about making God in our own image and another about the Lord's Supper. How do those two ideas fit together?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, we run through our life, all too often not able to slow down long enough to recognize you in our midst. We understand what the disciples mean when they say to each other: "The Lord was in this place, and we did not know it." We think our purpose is to rise above the chaos and messiness of life, when, in reality, you meet us in the very place of chaos and messiness. Help us to see you in the mundane. Help us to recognize you when we gather around your table. Help us to know that at every breakfast table, at every lunch table, at every dinner table you are there with us, taking, blessing, breaking, and finally giving new life to us. Give us the gift to offer a place at the table to the stranger among us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who was hospitable to all. Amen.

"Open our eyes, that we may see..."