

Third Sunday After Easter, May 11, 2014
Boone UMC; Jason Byassee
VBS mish moment; Mother's Day, Creekbank play

The Emmaus Disciples

I'm grateful to Dana Davis our music and arts director, for the *Back at the Creekbank* play, and also to the children and parents who led and participated, thank you all for your hard work.

Happy Mother's Day to all of you.

I wonder whether anyone enters into motherhood with *any idea* of how painful it will be? I don't just mean childbirth, though there's that (my gender, the weaker sex that I'm a member of has no idea, do we?) I mean *motherhood*. Soren Kierkegaard first said this in a way I could grasp: a child starts out right under a woman's heart, physically. And from that moment on the child gets farther and farther away—born outside her body, walking on their own, toddling away, going to school, leaving home, starting a family. Each step is one of distance away from mom. And yet every mother knows this is right and good and beautiful, it's the way of things. As long as once a year—like, today--flowers and a lunch out after church come her way. Motherhood is a sweet sadness, a bright sorrow, like life with God. A friend of mine with grown children says when she dreams about her sons they are toddlers all over again, in Spiderman footie pajamas, wanting to snuggle.

The story I'm about to read is an encounter with resurrection. This is part of a series on specific people who meet the risen Jesus and experience resurrection themselves. These two don't believe Jesus is risen, dreams have turned to ash in their mouths with his death.¹ Then *Jesus* appears with them, right before he vanishes. Here's maybe the most famous painting of that moment, by Caravaggio. Here's the point of this six week sermon series and of the whole Christian life. Resurrection isn't just something that happens to Jesus. It's something the Holy Spirit *makes* happen in each one of us. As we hear about resurrection in these two disciples' lives, let us stand and sing.

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 as you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of

¹ <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e0/Caravaggio - Cena in Emmaus.jpg>

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. 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 seen a vision of angels who said 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! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter his glory? 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.

That's the word of God, it belongs to you, the Easter people of God, thanks be to God.

As many of you know I've been facing a back injury and slow recovery for damaged nerves in my foot. It's why I limp and walk slowly and can't run. I'm told it will improve with time—but I'm no good at patience, I pray that God will give me patience, just not yet.

I was with a friend last week who has had cerebral palsy his whole life. Steve can walk with difficulty, he has a car fitted so he can drive, he spends much time in an electric wheelchair. And I'm complaining to him about my foot, right? Clueless of me. He's a hospital chaplain, so he's turned his disability into grace for others. He said this, and it's so full of gospel I have to share it with you. Whatever is coming, not just with your foot but in your life, I can promise you two things. One, it will cost more than you want to pay. Two, whatever comes, it will be more beautiful than you can possibly imagine. There's the whole gospel on Mother's

Day or any day: it will cost more than you want to pay and be more beautiful than you can imagine.

These disciples think they have paid everything. They are leaving. Jesus is gone, he is graveyard dead and all their hopes are lost. Have you ever had a hope dashed like that? What am I asking, of course you have. You're human beings. And on a day like Mother's Day we should especially acknowledge those whose dreams have been dashed, who wish they were mothers and are not, who have lost children, children with a mother who was more nightmare than dream, or mothers with children like that. Mother's Day is one of the church's most attended days of the year, up there with Christmas and Easter, but some stay away, it's too painful. The bible knows that pain. God knows your pain. You are not alone. And this is the miraculous thing: your place of pain also becomes your place of healing for you and others. Just as Jesus' wounds are healed and give life, so too our wounds are places God blesses us, and through us, blesses other people.

I wonder why these two disciples on the way to Emmaus didn't notice the wounds in Jesus' hands and side? Were they were too stuck in their pain to see their savior right in front of them?

This is where Jesus is just not fair. He walks with them. They're miserable. He knows full well why. But he teases them. They ask, hey, are you the only idiot in the world who doesn't know what just happened in Jerusalem? Jesus says, uh, I guess I am, tell me? They so don't recognize him they tell him the whole story. I wonder how often it is with us this way? We face so much, we have our complaints for God. My child is on drugs. My spouse is distant and my marriage is faltering. My job is gone. My dreams taunt me. I miss mom. And Jesus listens patiently. We think God is far away and Jesus is right there listening. Occasionally he touches the wounds in his own hands, almost absent-mindedly, but we don't notice.

I heard a monologue from Craig Ferguson this week, the Scottish host of the *Late Late Show* who's stepping down. It was from when his father died, but it can count for Mother's Day. He said I'll go back to making fun of Starbucks and Brittni Spears next week. For now my father is dead. And he said my father worked in the post office in Edinburgh for 40 years. He was a tough man, when I showed up for work hungover he made me unload planes at the airport in the dead of winter, I never showed up late again. But he worked hard *for me*. Ferguson said, and this is where my ear perked up, he said it was a spiritual thing. My father didn't know how to talk about God or love. He just worked hard. And that was how he loved us. He'd be bone tired on Christmas morning, shipping mail all over the world, and yet would be there with presents to see our delight. And this is what Craig Ferguson said, not a preacher, not paid to

talk about God, he said,² “I think there’s more to this spirituality thing than scented candles and aromatherapy.” A parent’s hard work is a sign of the love and goodness of God. So said a comedian through tears on national television. Isn’t it so for us too?

Here’s the point of this story and the point of all things. We think we discover God on our own. If only we think the right thoughts, say the right prayer, breathe through our eyebrows and say om or whatever. But it’s not true. We discover God *only* together. We think we learn about God by getting centered, navel gazing, thinking deep thoughts or traveling somewhere exotic. No. We do it by opening the scriptures together. Our age thinks religion is about being right or yelling at someone or scaring people. No. It’s about Jesus as host, breaking bread, showing us he’s been with us all along. There’s the whole thing: we pursue God together, over scripture, over bread, with Jesus as our host. There is more to this religion thing than scented candles and aromatherapy. There’s each other, difficult as we are. There is scripture, difficult as it is. And Jesus. And as soon as we glimpse him . . . he’s gone.

So Jesus meets these two on the road and has a bible study with them. We can get discouraged about numbers in church. I had a footwashing service during Holy Week and four people came. I was bummed out. But my four people at footwashing was two *more* than Jesus had at this bible study. And Jesus didn’t complain at all.³ When he’s done they say “did not our hearts burn within us as we walked with him on the road and as he opened the scriptures to us?” This is why we have community groups at our church, why we have bible studies, we find our hearts pulse with life when we search for Jesus in this book. Many in our community have seen their lives revolutionized by a retreat called the Walk to Emmaus, where they sing and hear talks and read scripture and learn to love God, in three short days. I’ve noticed when I get away and travel to pursue Jesus we change, we’re stretched, we grow. The church calls it pilgrimage. Walking far together we meet Jesus in one another and the scriptures and in food and are made new.

Then notice this. Jesus goes from teasing us, to deadly serious.⁴ Deep comedy and deep seriousness go together or don’t happen at all. Rainer Rilke said it this way, “Nearby is the country they call life. You will know it by its seriousness.” God is equal measure playful and absolutely earnest. He wants to walk with us and know us by name.

We get one name in this story. Cleopas. The other person is unnamed. Maybe we can imagine our*selves* in the unnamed person. I heard a story this week of a teenager in a youth group in Texas. That group decided to read the bible together over the course of two years, every word of it. And they took a pilgrimage to two places: one, to Selma Alabama, to see

² Ferguson quote on screen please

³ Lk 24:32 on screen plz

⁴ Rilke quote on screen plz

where Civil Rights marchers were beaten as they sought their freedom. And two, to England, to see where John and Charles Wesley started a revival by sharing the gospel with coal miners and orphans. This youth group member was named Tina. She had a Ritalin problem that became a meth problem and she was kicked out of school and family. This church was the only place that would have her. And at the end of two years she came to her youth pastor and said ‘you know how God changes people’s names in the bible all the time? Well my name is new. Don’t call me Tina anymore. Call me *Christina*. Christ has made me new, God has changed everything about me.’ You see what happens when we read scripture together over bread over time in new places? We become *characters in the story*. And God not only learns our name God changes our name. God doesn’t save in general. God doesn’t say “I love all people everywhere. Now who are you?” God knows our name, knows our pain, and transforms us in the bottomless ocean of his love. Don’t call me Tina anymore. Call me Christina.

When the walk to Emmaus is over Jesus tries to leave. For real, look, ⁵“he walked ahead as if he were going on.” Where’s he going? Did they really have to beg him? He stays.⁶ And at table he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it away. Communion. I’m struck how many people remember their mother best when they think of her cooking. These two recognize Jesus, and he vanishes from their sight. So much to say here. No more time to say it in. First, where did they see him? Not in their sadness. Not in their walk, though they started to feel a flame in their hearts then. Not even in the bible. But in the breaking of bread. At table. With one another.⁷ Ella Baker, the great North Carolina Civil Rights leader, said this, “When you share your food with people you share your lives with people.” I bet she learned that at the little Baptist church she grew up in. I’ve heard of churches that post that above the door of the room they eat together in: “they recognized him in the breaking of bread.”

Before the food is in their mouths, they see Jesus right there at table and then he’s gone. Really gone. Won’t come back this time. Till he does.

Friends I wish I could say it won’t be that way with us. But it is. As soon as we see Jesus, he’s gone. And we’re left hungering for more of him. And the way to get more Jesus is this: walk with others, especially those not like us. Break open scripture with them. Serve and eat and cleanup food with them. And see Jesus right there in your midst. As soon as you do, he’s gone. And that’s news so good it changes the universe. It’s the truth about motherhood and about God and about us. It will cost more than we want to pay. And it will be more beautiful than we ever imagined. Amen.

⁵ Lk 24:28 on screen plz

⁶ <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e0/Caravaggio - Cena in Emmaus.jpg>

⁷ On screen from Ella Baker

