

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

"On Your Journey"

Today's Gospel reading brings us the account of two people, two of Jesus' followers, not Apostles – but disciples – followers, who were walking a seven mile journey to the village of Emmaus. These two people were trying to process the events that took place the last three days but especially earlier that day in Jerusalem, as well as the arrest, crucifixion and death of Jesus. An interesting point of discussion regarding this Scripture from Luke – it does not say that these were two men. Read it carefully. I went and poured over a dozen different translations – and they all say "that two of them were going to a village called Emmaus." The original Greek said that this was "60 stadia" or eleven kilometers from Jerusalem. What makes this interesting is that we know for sure that one man named "Cleopas" was making this journey, and so who was the other person? Some scholars have thought that it might be Luke who was with Cleopas – but as our Wednesday night study on the Book of Acts – Luke left little clues that indicated his presence by always saying "us" or "we." There is no "we or us" in this twenty fourth chapter of Luke. Others have thought that this is Cleopas' wife Mary, who was at the crucifixion with Jesus' mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and John the Apostle. (John 19:25) *"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."* The wife of Cleopas may well have been Mary the wife of Clopas – and if so this Scripture interpreted that way has been of great encouragement to couples who have found the story a wonderful focus for bringing their lives together, bringing their problems and their questions before Jesus. I want to suggest that like how Scripture does not tell us the kind of fruit in the Garden of Eden – it just says the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil – it doesn't tell us if it is a cumquat, a banana, and apple, people have made that deduction on their own. I also want to suggest to you that we hear about Joseph's "Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat" – check the Scriptures- in Genesis it says it was "an ornate coat." People have filled in between the lines. I guess the point that I wanted to make is that if God wanted us to know these details – He would have told us who this other person was. God is really good at details – when they are important. Who accompanied Cleopas that day – it is not important – and so we move on.

Along comes a stranger who immediately asks them what they are discussing that is making them look so downcast. They tell him that they had regarded Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet, and more than a prophet. God's power had been present with Him in His miracles and His teaching, and they couldn't doubt that this was the Man of God's choice, the anointed One. The chief priests and the rulers of the Temple handed Him over to die – on a cross. He was the one who would redeem Israel – and it has only been three days! These two followers were devastated; it wasn't just that Jesus had been the bearer of their hopes and He was now dead and gone. It was much more than that: if Jesus had been the one to redeem Israel, He should have been defeating the pagans who were oppressing and holding them down – and not dying at their hands.

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The whole story, from Genesis to the prophets, pointed forward to a fulfillment which could only be found when God's anointed One took Israel's suffering, and the world's suffering as well, on to Himself, died under its own weight, then rose again as the beginning of God's new creation, God's new people; God's new covenant. This is what had to happen; and now it just had. They still could not recognize Him - but I want to suggest to you that Jesus' body, emerging from the tomb, had been transformed. It was the same, yet it was different. The very fact that they couldn't recognize Jesus at first goes hand in hand with the fact that they couldn't recognize the events that had just happened as the story of God's redemption. I believe that we can only know Jesus, can only truly recognize Him, when we learn to see Him within the whole story - History - His-story; the true story of God, Israel and the world. To do that we need to learn how to read the Scriptures; and for that we need, as our teacher, the risen Lord Himself. This passage forms one of the most powerful encouragements to pray for His presence, and sense of guidance, whenever we study the Bible, individually, in pairs, in small groups or in larger groups. We need to be prepared for Him to rebuke our foolish and faithless readings, and to listen for His fresh interpretation on our hearts. Only with Him at our side will our hearts burn within us (verse 32), and lead us to the point where we see Him face to face. Jesus opened their minds to Him in the Scriptures and how they all point to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises.

I need to share with you a personal testimony and how that changed my life - and my relationship with Jesus. I have shared with many of you before - right from the beginning - of my healing in the Jordan and my calling to ordained ministry - but this is before that. I grew up in a wonderful family that was Roman Catholic - and my parents wanted us (me and my three sisters) to grow up as good people who loved Jesus. They did a good job! I have always loved Jesus with all my heart - but I did not know Him! Jesus was always in my life - but like a beautiful statue - visible - but at a great distance. Marilyn and I decided shortly after moving to Jacksonville, Florida in 1994 to come together to what was then the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. We truly felt at home, where we loved the people and the congregation, as well as the rector - who many of you know is now our Bishop, Bishop Neil Lebharr. We really felt at home from that very first Sunday when we received Communion together for the first time in eighteen years of married life. Marilyn had been Presbyterian and I was Roman Catholic - the two did not mix as far as Holy Communion, but that Sunday we went up with our two kids and knelt at the altar rail and went back in tears - knowing that we were home; that a door had been opened for us in our lives. I wanted to learn, and so did Marilyn, and serve the Body of Christ - but I still did not truly know Jesus.

Two friends of ours, Paul and Callie Head, invited us to go on a renewal weekend (from Thursday to Sunday) but we could not go together - there was a men's weekend and the following week for the women. Paul and Callie would be our sponsors and they even paid for us to go - and then drove each of us to the camp in Live Oak, after treating us to dinner. This experience was like none I had ever experienced, and I started missing Marilyn and our kids - especially when they took our watches away, and cell phones. No communication with the outside world: what was I getting into? This was an amazing time of fellowship like I had never

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experienced before – with a lot of singing and surprises - but I was still at a distance. Somewhere on Saturday I had an experience after one of the talks that I can only describe as life changing. We all went into the chapel and there while praying – it was as if Jesus was suddenly standing right in front of me – face to face – and He said to me very clearly - “what took so long?” I felt so very different and I think I went through a box of Kleenex with my tears of joy, relief and blessing. Whatever barriers I had built up were instantly gone as I recognized Jesus as my Lord and Savior – personally. It is a funny thing that I haven’t often shared with people – but in 1999 after the healing in the Jordan when I was blessed to run up out of the water, I had been limping before that, and now I was running up the steps, proclaiming that I had been healed. Two days after that while sitting with two others at the lower waterfall at En Gedi, after the Lord called me to the priesthood, telling me I must do this “in grateful obedience” – when I rushed to tell Marilyn and the kids – the first words out of her mouth were “what took so long.” To this day she still does not know why she said that – but it was an incredible affirmation for me – having heard those exact words once before. I knew it was real and it was non-negotiable.

That weekend experience was called Cursillo. There are weekends from other denominations that are very similar and are “Tres Dias” and “Walk to Emmaus.” I find it kind of ironic that during that walk on that first Easter Sunday – when Cleopas and companion met Jesus –only recognizing Him when He broke the bread with them – that renewal comes to others in the same way on such weekend retreats as Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus. The significance, to me, is so very real – that when we take the opportunity to shut the outside world out and take time to truly talk to Jesus – then we can really truly recognize Him – giving Him ourselves and our lives. You don’t have to go on a four day weekend – but if you just take some time – stop talking and start listening – you’ll be amazed at what Jesus has to say!

I know that many people of our parish have been to Cursillo or weekends just like it – and I would love to see our church family become involved in having an Ultreya reunion here at St. Andrew’s singing songs, sharing experiences with the Lord in our lives, and breaking bread together.

And so my dear friends - give Jesus your heart and then bring Him your problems, your agony, your struggles just as on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and his companion; be prepared to share it in prayer with the blessed One who approaches – for them it was a stranger. Learn to listen for His voice, explaining His Word, leading forward, and warming your heart by applying Holy Scripture to what’s going on in your life.