

Has this ever happened to you?
I'm in a grocery store, the mall, or Target maybe
and someone comes up to me and they say
"Hey Jeremy! How have you been?
It's been such a long time. You look great."
I look deep into their eyes and I think for a second
and the truth begins to sink in....
I have no idea who this person is.
Has that ever happened to you?
I have met so many new people in almost 30 years of ministry.
And sometimes the face looks familiar but the name escapes me.
We have all had an encounter of an unrecognized identity, haven't we?
Today we have a big one.

Our first encounter with Jesus comes from Luke 24.

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

What same day is that?
Luke tells us that we are still talking about
Resurrection Sunday but in the afternoon.
There are two disciples,
not part of the 11 remaining that Jesus had picked,
but these two were followers of Jesus
who had been there when the women
told about the angel's glorious testimony.
We do not know the exact location of the disciples' encounter
or the exact location of Emmaus,
but many believe that it is about 18 miles from Jerusalem.
And why are they on this journey?

Perhaps they were fleeing the possible danger
that was now in Jerusalem or headed home defeated.
As they were walking another person began to walk with them.

15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.

They encountered Jesus himself.

16 but they (their eyes) were kept from recognizing him.

We don't know why.
Perhaps Jesus wanted to see if these two followers
would understand the events that had transpired
over the last three days or wanted to find out
what his followers were saying about him.
We don't know the reason.

We do know that it was the work of the Holy Spirit because Luke tells us that.

We hear this story now and think
they must have been pretty dense.
Who would miss it if Jesus were standing right next to them?
But the reality is that a lot of us would.

Do we recognize Jesus each time we encounter him?

If Jesus were to come into this sanctuary or
meet us at the store and say hi would we recognize him?
Do we always recognize the times
when God is trying to tell us something?
If you are anything like me the answer is no.
So a question before us this morning is
what prevents us from seeing Jesus clearly
and what can we do to see Jesus more clearly
working in our lives and walking with us on our journey?

As most of you know last fall,
I led as Assistant Spiritual Director on the Men's Walk to Emmaus.
And it was actually almost 10 years before that
when I went on my own Emmaus Walk.
I didn't know what to expect, somewhat on purpose,
as being a pastor, I was afraid I would try to
anticipate everything that was going to happen.
That is one of the things they tell you on your walk.
Don't anticipate.

Over the previous 10 years before my walk,
I had heard about Emmaus at one time or another
from my folks who had gone and I had seen
a transformation in them as leaders in the churches I served.
And I wanted to know how that happened.
But I had never heard much about
the actual experience they had because
no one would talk to me about it.
It was almost like it was a secret society and
that only if you know the secret handshake
can you be told about it.
Incidentally, I did ask about the handshake on my walk
and they admitted they don't have one.

One of the Emmaus' struggles I have found is
maintaining the sense of mystery that allows you
to be open to the Holy Spirit and the 72 hours of being

immersed in total agape love and study
while not becoming a secret club who have
a spiritual experience that sets them apart
from everybody else and that they never share.
That is not what Emmaus is intended to be.
What Emmaus does is close out the world to allow you
to experience a completely focused time
on God and God's love and grace.
And you do it surrounded by men or women.
Disciples walking on the road together.

So a disciple named later Cleopas and a companion—
a friend, brother, or maybe his wife.

This might be the same Cleopas and his wife
who was one of those at the cross with Mary
and went to the tomb with the other Marys.

Amid their animated discussion
about all that's been going on,
they suddenly notice that a stranger has joined them.
Who is it? We know it's Jesus, but they don't.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They're flabbergasted their **faces downcast**.

18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

How is it that this stranger doesn't know
about the shocking things that have taken place
during these last few days in Jerusalem?

Let's savor the moment and appreciate the irony here:
this uninformed "stranger," Jesus, is the only one
who actually does know what's going on.

And the real irony is that sometimes
those of us who think we get it can forget.
We can forget that God is still changing lives.
We can begin to question and ask does
anything that I do really make a difference?
We can ask where is God in all of this?
But on my Emmaus walk and leading one
I saw a God who was real and present
working in these men's lives in a way I don't often
get to see in the every Sunday of church life.
I watched these men surround each other in love
as they each shared their scars and prayed for one another.

We laughed and we cried.
For some Jesus was a stranger walking along the road
at the beginning and by the end, he at least had
become a friend and for some truly a Savior.
In this encounter, Jesus' voice is
eclipsed by their grief, doubt, and anguish.
They want to believe the end had not come for Jesus,
but the fact they were on the road out of the city
indicates they could not believe.
It is interesting that in every post-resurrection story,
We are going to find that Jesus is not initially recognized.

24:19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,

This was a heartbreaking experience.
Have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words
in our language begin with the letter D?
For example, disappointment, doubt,
disillusionment, defeat, despair and death.
All of these are summed up in the words of Cleopas
and his companion to the stranger
who joined them on the Emmaus road.
They had left the dispirited and confused band of disciples
with the events of Good Friday fresh in their memories.
Their hopes were dashed and the dream was over.
The band of Jesus' followers was leaderless
and was falling apart, with two of them already on their way home.
Since then, even stranger things have happened.

In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.

The reports that Christ's tomb was empty
did nothing to alter their thinking; it only confused them.
Their entire world had come apart.
The two despondent disciples summed up the situation very neatly,
"we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."
What they were saying is
"We don't expect it now, but once we did.
I wonder if this is something that we can identify with?
Has something or someone come between our relationship with God?
At the heart of their confusion is the failure
to understand what Jesus has been trying

to teach them since they left Galilee:
the Messiah must suffer, die, and be resurrected—
and his disciples must take up their cross and follow him.
At this point, we can almost feel Jesus' frustration.
He can't hold himself back any longer.

25 "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

So, as they walk along together,
Jesus, without revealing himself,
gives them a remedial lesson in Messianic Destiny 101.
Later on, they'll recall how their hearts
burned within them as this stranger opened up the scriptures to them.
Then comes the turning point in the story.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.

Wait a minute!
They still haven't recognized him.
If they simply say goodbye at this point,
the significance of the entire Emmaus encounter would be lost.
They don't know it,
but it's really a test since he had taught them
about showing hospitality to strangers.

But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

They remind him that it's late.
They urge him to stay with them,
to enjoy a meal together. Jesus accepts.

By now in Luke's Gospel,
we know that whenever anyone sits down to dine with Jesus,
it's always meaningful and often miraculous.

Sure enough, **When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him** They can see now. **—just as he disappears from their midst.**

If this sounds familiar,
it's almost certainly because this isn't the first time
Jesus has demonstrated who he is through the breaking of bread.

After all, that's exactly what happened
back in Galilee when he fed the five thousand.
It was after he blessed and broke the bread,
that suddenly there was more than enough to feed everyone.
And afterward, the first thing Jesus asks his disciples is,
"Who do you say that I am?"

32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

And finally, it became too much to ignore.
They had to see it.
Sometimes we have those moments too.
When it just becomes too much to ignore our encounter with Jesus.
When our eyes, for however short a time, are opened wide.
When we can't argue it away anymore, and we have to believe.
At the Walk to Emmaus,
it was in something called giving up
our dying moment in the breaking of bread
and taking up our living moment in the receiving of bread.
It is seeing Jesus revealed to men going through hard things,
growing up broken, and some not even realizing
they were broken until we gathered together.
These things are too real to ignore.

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

The thing that strikes me every time
I read this text is what those two disciples do
once they realize they've been
in the company of the resurrected Jesus.
They get up from that table and go directly back
to Jerusalem away from safety and back to a place of persecution.
Because of this Emmaus encounter with Jesus,
they realize they've been going the wrong way.
They need to return to be with the rest of his followers,
because following the Messiah means making him Lord,
putting our life at his disposal—even if it's risky.

Clopas and the rest of the disciples
shared their stories of the risen Christ
and strengthened each other's faith.

They met together and held each other accountable.
We can certainly find salvation in Jesus by ourselves
But we can't be followers without being together...

Because these disciples trusted in him as their Messiah,
they let him be Lord over their lives,
maybe not all the time,
but often enough that others began to notice.
And then they met and helped others understand
that he was the Messiah, and, before long,
more and more lives were turned around.

So, what started as a movement of no more
than 100 disciples became billions.
That's what happens when we Christians
not only confess with our words,
but demonstrate with our lives,
that Jesus is our Lord and Messiah.
When we encounter Jesus and the power of the resurrection,
We learn that the road to Emmaus
Was the road back to hope.