



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Directionally Challenged” **Sermon on Luke 24:13-35**

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Third Sunday of Easter

Luke is a Gospel for the directionally challenged. The lost make U-turns, “Rejoice with me for what was lost is found! Was dead and now is alive!” Listen so that you won’t be lost.

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 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?”

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, 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.”

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 into his glory?” Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. When he

was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

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?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

I don't think of myself as directionally challenged, except when I'm in the church, this church. You see, the first time I looked at this facility was on Google Maps. I was back in Durham, and as I zoomed into the Street View, I must have flipped the map. I had the church on the other side of the road and even though that was many years ago, when I'm in this pulpit and only in this pulpit, I think downtown is that way! But it's not, and on this we can agree.

East, West, North, South.

If we were Eastern Orthodox, a sense of direction would be easier, for the altar faces EAST, "Here, we await Christ, the Rising Sun from on High." Ultimately the cardinal points of the compass don't give us our direction in the Church. We get our direction from God, and our lives should follow. Right?

I suspect there are times when you feel close to God and times when God seems distant. So, where is your proximity to God right now? Got the answer? Which direction would you like to go? Closer or farther away? You're here for a reason. What's the first step in the right direction? There are lots of directions in the Church! There is the horizontal. We live life with Christ on a horizontal plane. We go out into the world and preach the Gospel. This Saturday is FaithWorks. Sign up for FaithWorks. It's a great way to meet people and it's a great way to live out the word. If you're new to Westminster or visiting, come and sign up! We meet in the cafe at the North End, and from there we'll assemble garden planters for our community garden, or create 10,000 meals in the gym, or help Habitat homeowners. We go out as the cross says on the floor to the four corners of the earth. Living out the Good Word. Sign up! A big part of the gospel is about showing up! It's what we talk about at your funeral. The Horizontal!

But theology has a vertical direction as well. We lift our prayers up to God. The dove of the Spirit that descends, and drives us to march off the map and discover a powerful God that's at work transforming and reconciling all things. "We have seen the Lord." Right? We don't always agree! Scripture tells us that the resurrection doesn't dawn on people all at the same time! Some folks need to hear their names. Some folks need to see the wounds. Some folks need a netful of fish. Some folks need a change of direction.

In today's scripture, we have two people who are walking to Emmaus. And if you want directions to Emmaus, good luck. Historians and scholars say there are nine possible locations for Emmaus. There are places in this world that are of no significance at all. Emmaus is one of those. The prodigal son is famous for thinking that that's the way to go, that is what life is about. And when he gets there, it is nowhere to be. It's empty.

Cleopas and his unnamed friend, maybe you or me, find themselves heading to nowhere in particular. If you know someone who is heading nowhere, getting them to change directions is darn near impossible. Try to change the alcoholic? The workaholic, the sportsaholic, the moneyaholic. Turning a church around can be darn near impossible. Some people prefer to fight, some just prefer to decay. A church with no purpose, now that's not a church!

Two disciples heading for nowhere all about the news, the bad news, the sad news. And they're joined by a stranger who doesn't know the bad news, the sad news. "Where are you from? Are you the only stranger, alien, who doesn't know this news about Jesus? He was a prophet, I guess. He sure wasn't a messiah because we had hoped he would redeem Israel. He was handed over, and he was crucified, and it's now been three days. Some women came with a story of how his body wasn't there, but they saw angels!"

The story that those two disciples tell the stranger sounds so familiar. I've heard it before back in Luke 9:21. Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone this..." "The son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected, and he must be killed and then on the third day...."

I heard it back in Luke 9:43. Jesus said to his disciples: "Listen carefully, Son of man is going to be handed over, crucified, and then on the third day..."

I heard it back in Luke 18. "Jesus said to the twelve who were gathered, 'the Son of Man will be delivered over, they will mock him, flog him, kill him, and on the third day he will rise again...'" You can hear things over and over and over again, and never get it at all. It's what I call "preaching."

"We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel."

"You fools!" He says to Cleopas, the unnamed disciple, You and me!

"You fools!" Wow! What happened to Jesus? That Jesus isn't from around here. That's a Yankee Jesus! Yankee Jesus is a stranger and alien! Less fool and more Southern Jesus...."Bless your heart!"

Now, I wouldn't mind preaching a Yankee Jesus from time to time. Getting up in the pulpit... "You fools, what are you doing here? How long must I put up with this perverse generation. Do you believe this stuff or not! If you believe it, live it! If you don't, you're wasting my time, God's time, and your time!" Yankee Jesus would be fun, but I need to collect a paycheck.

The resurrected Jesus is an alien. The Word of the Lord can be like nothing we've ever heard.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring Good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to those who are stuck behind bars because there was no justice, to proclaim release for those stuck in the prison of unforgiving bitterness, to release of those in prison from all-consuming hatred, release to those in prison of cyclical worry. I'm here to restore sight to those who have never seen a living hope! And this will be the best year ever!

This is what our Risen Lord tells us. We hear this Word over and over and over and over.... Does it give us any direction? Does it dispel our worries? Does it stop bigotry? Does it fill our hearts with the desire for peace? Does it work? In what direction are we headed?

In a moment, you will hold body and blood, and see what the Lord has for us.

On the night in which he was betrayed... On the night when people distanced themselves... On the night everyone feared for their own lives... On the night when we would sell our soul to the devil, to preserve whatever is left... On the night before the cock crowed and Peter cut himself shaving and looked in the mirror at the blood trickling down his cheek and knew that there are things worse than dying, and that's selling your soul.

Where are you heading?

On night in which he was betrayed, he broke bread and their eyes were opened, and they turned around and went somewhere...back to church. Back to worship. Back to joy. Back to believing there's nothing in this world that can separate us from the love of Christ.

Maybe it will happen to us.

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