

Walking to Emmaus
Luke 24:13-35
By Ridgley Joyner
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As many of you know, last week concluded our series called “Wandering Heart: Figuring out Faith with Peter” Each week, we followed through the stories of Jesus through the perspective of Peter’s faith journey as it presented twists and turns. One of my favorite parts of the series was getting to compile a devotional showcasing your moments of experiencing God as you walk your faith journey as it presented twists and turns.

While we just spent 40 days dwelling in our stories together, it seems fitting that this week’s scripture reading puts on the road to Emmaus with two disciples on Resurrection Sunday. As we read on Easter Sunday, the first Easter- that resurrection morn was not joyous on all accounts—there were a myriad of emotions—doubt, fear, confusion. The day has dawned, Mary Magdelene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James went to the tomb with spices and discovered Christ was no longer there. They run to tell the 11 disciples and they did not believe the women. Even Peter’s story ended with him going to tomb to see for himself, picking up the strips of linen and walking away, wondering what on earth could have happened.

Our passage begins here---two disciples are on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a 7 mile walk with A LOT to talk about. What on earth happened? Was this true? This teacher, this healer, had he risen from the dead like the women said? It is on this journey, they encounter a stranger as they walk along. He asks “What are you discussing?”

Where have you been? Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have happened in these days? Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. He preached and healed, he taught. We had hoped he would redeem Israel. But instead the chief priests and rulers handed him over. He was killed by the Romans, crucified mocked and murdered. Now he is missing, some people say that he is risen from the dead, all we know is that his body isn’t there anymore.

Jesus then proceeds to walk and talk with them for the remainder of their journey—explaining all the scriptures to them beginning with Moses and the prophets. When they arrive in the village, they invite this stranger to their home. In extending hospitality, they discover when the bread breaks that the Lord is in their very midst. They recognize him and as quickly as they notice him, he disappears from their sight. They’re left reflecting back on their day realizing that this whole time, they were communing with Jesus of Nazareth, messiah, king, the risen Lord. They immediately return to Jerusalem to share their experience with the eleven and those with them saying “It is true! The Lord has risen!”

Here these two people could likely share with you all the knowledge about Jesus of Nazareth, from the times of Moses, to the prophets. Yet, it is in a sheer every day act of hospitality and breaking bread around a table after a long days’ journey that they experience God and are transformed. It is through both ordinary and extravagant moments that our eyes are opened to God in our midst. Sometimes it isn’t even until after the event has happened that we realize God’s hand on it all—our

journeys of faith are not meant to be lived alone, our stories of experiencing God are not meant to be held in isolation. They are meant to be joyous shared and processed together, it is how we learn, it is how we grow, and it is how we craft our vision for God at work in the world. This passage is so full of talking—discussing, processing, teaching, sharing, inviting. It shows us that our journey of faith is one that is constantly being fleshed out through our own experiences of life.

Today we joyously stood by our confirmands once again as they confirmed the promises their parents made at their baptisms. To continue their journey of faith, an ongoing discovery of what it means to be a child of God. While so much of confirmation is about information, focusing on *knowing* about God—my goal was to show our confirmands that you can *know* about God. In fact, you can spend your whole life pursuing knowledge about God, but it isn't until you are able to fuse that with the experience of God that your life is transformed. And that is an ongoing process- a journey of a wandering heart bound to God almighty, the one who walked the path for us, and who walks the path with us.

And you, St. John's are showing them just that—

(the following excerpts are from the 2024 Lenten Devotional)

“my granddaughter awoke early so we headed out of the house to walk and talk, and as the sun began to rise, the sky was painted with beautiful shades of purple, blue peach and pink. She squeezed my hand and said ‘God did that, God is real’”

“I went to church for the first time in a while and the sermon discussed God's grace as an abundant gift we've been given by God. We do nothing to earn it. In fact, we don't deserve it. But God showers it on us anyway. It is unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. It's free. Something happened to me that morning, during worship. I started crying. I understood the meaning of grace in a personal way.”

“after moving my husband with dementia into memory care, I watched as miracles took place. I saw a brilliant, loving man with a humble spirit live with courage and accept that this was now his home. I watched God work through him to touch the lives of residents and staff in ways I could never have dreamed. Trusting the care of my precious husband to God has been the hardest thing I've ever had to do. It took relinquishing my will and desire to handle everything. I had to trust Him to work through others for his care.”

“just as I can see the hand of God in the beauty of a rainbow, a sunset or in the twinkle of one of my grandkid's eyes, so too can I see the hand of God in the incredible beauty of the universe and all the galaxies it contains. Often times, it is as I contemplate the vastness of the universe that I feel God closest to me. To me, this is all a visible witness to the majesty, power, and ever expanding presence of God as (s)he surrounds us, embraces us and gives us all a huge cosmic hug right in the middle of it.”

“The past 2 years have been both emotionally and financially challenging since my divorce, yet never have I felt alone.”

“After a devastating diagnosis, I opened my Bible and read Psalm 121 and prayed in a conversational way. I told God that I would find the strength to fight the disease, but I needed his help with my fears. I cannot explain what happened next because there was nothing tangible about

it. I did feel a presence and relief. I felt unburdened and from that time on, I took on the physical fight without fear. I did not ask for a miracle, but in the end, I got one.”

“I had lost my wedding band on the beach-- I don’t believe that God moved the ring so that I could see it, but I do believe that the brief moment of prayer calmed my spirit enough that I was able to look without disturbing the sand and burying the ring. At that moment I felt God’s presence in my life and I strongly felt God’s blessing on our marriage.”

“I was on a mission trip in Haiti and across from where we stayed in our gated and guarded compound, there was a church with praise music streaming from its doors and windows every night. Here in this small town in Haiti, where the poverty was overwhelming, these people were happy, they praised God at the top of their lungs. God was present.”

I was overwhelmed, and I said, for reasons I can’t explain, “Thank you, God, for letting me be here.” Almost immediately, a warm, surge-like sensation filled me, and I started crying. I felt such gratitude – not for being in Hawaii – but for being able to experience such sensory beauty, and to know that these things had been created. I felt embraced and uplifted.

“Wow! What happened? An impossible situation was resolved beautifully in less than 24 hours. Wait! Is there really a Jesus? Does he really help people? But I am not a believer. Why did he help me? Who is Jesus?”

After my accident, a stranger stopped and stood by my window – and asked if she could pray with me. I gratefully accepted her offer and was comforted and calmed by this complete stranger’s actions. When the police arrived, she got back in her car and drove away. We still don’t know her name.

I eventually realized, as someone who no longer believes, but KNOWS, there is a BETTER place. I’m to share the message with others who experience a loss. If sharing my story, my experience, can bring comfort to at least one person who otherwise would never know that peace, that’s okay for me. If that’s the reason for me still being here, I’m okay with that.

God has somehow helped me relive the perspective of a young person and marry it with the wisdom I’ve gained. He has given me imagination. He has gently guided me to explore our faith more deeply and showed me how to talk about it in ways that make it real for our kids. He’s helped me remember

So, as you can see, what seemed like a horrible situation, turned out to be a huge blessing from God!

I had a very vivid dream where I felt God was making clear to me that it was time for me to make this move

And so, Ellie, Ryan, Brandon, James and Sarah, as we continue to share our stories about how Christ is truly risen in our lives, may you hear our living breathing affirmation of faith:

(The following are excerpts from the 2024 Lenten Devotional)

- A sunset, cloud formation, a bird or flower can bring a sense of awe and wonder, is an assurance of God’s presence and hand in this world.

-Besides being overcome with the understanding that God's grace extended even to me, I began to learn that the Holy Spirit, Christ's Spirit within, was inside me, a bit like having my own personal teacher guiding me to learn about who Christ is.

-God has promised he will be there with us, even in the lowest, most exhausting and frustrating times.

-in the darkest moments of your life, God can do his mightiest work.

-God gives you the strength every day to do the things you need to do, even the things you don't want to do.

-Jesus affirms faithfulness but understands unfaithfulness, and loves us still

-I know that God is at work in our lives and we are listening and praying as the future unfolds.

-I have felt God guiding me through my entire work life.

-God does answer prayers and along the way sends his helpers, angels, if you will.

- Amidst the darkness there was always light, and for that I am most grateful and inspired. I truly understand now that when a door closes, a window will open if you are willing to take a risk, have faith, and believe. With increasing stability, I continue to make "peace from pieces" using a synthesis of both the new and the old.

- Often, we take for granted all the goodness that is sitting right beside us, each one of us, today, and every day. We are so blessed to have one another, through good times and tough times. God puts people in our lives to help us see his goodness and love. None of us are meant to journey through life alone.

-As it turned out, God had a plan.

-I've never doubted my belief in God, but there have been several times in my life when I've known – absolutely known – that there is a higher power.

-we all remember that ecstatic, God-given celebration of Jesus (and Tom's surprising re-birth), and will never lose that joy we all experienced together.

-This is when I came to understand that before God can call you into something new, sometimes God has to call you out of something old, and that can feel uncertain and painful, but the view is better if I put my trust in God.

-These experiences help me to understand that I need to lift up my worries to God and trust that He will protect and guide me.

Again and Again God meets us on the dusty path we are journeying on—again and again God reaches out to us in grace, Again and Again, we our sight is regained. God is good. Again and again. In the name of the father, son and holy ghost. Amen.