

“Seeing God in Hindsight”

Luke 24:13-35

April 22nd, 2001 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

We think that Cleopas was the uncle of Jesus – Joseph’s brother. It has been speculated that Luke was the other traveler on the road to Emmaus, since Luke was the only one who included this narrative in his gospel. So what I’d like to do is attempt to reproduce what the conversation sounded like, just after Jesus vanished from that dinner meeting. Perhaps this is some of what Cleopas said to his wife, when she came back from the kitchen with part of dinner and found only Luke and her husband sitting there without the guest they had brought along.

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“The visitor? I’ll tell you but you better sit down and set the plate on the table. That visitor – I can’t even begin to believe this happened – but it did. I guess you just better sit down and I’ll tell you how it happened.

I know that it sounds crazy but the One Who came in the door with us, . . . well let me tell you from the beginning.

Uh, no, He’s not coming back, at least for dinner. Just hear me out.

This afternoon, Luke here, and I, were coming home from Jerusalem and we figured it would take us the usual three hours if we didn’t hurry. We decided to take our time walking along, talking about all the events that had happened to Jesus: the arrest, the trial, the torture and His death. And talking about it was all so depressing and confusing – I guess since we had been following Jesus’ life from the start and because Jesus was our nephew, well, you know, . . . all the time we spent with Him and His followers was weighing heavily on us. Luke and I were still feeling pretty shook up by the weekend’s happenings and when it came right down to it, we didn’t understand how God could let it happen.

Well, about a mile out of Jerusalem, another

traveler on the road caught up to us and joined us. It wasn’t long before He asked us what we were talking about. You know, we were so glum and turned into our own feelings, that we never bothered to introduce ourselves. Maybe it was because we were so saddened by the events of the weekend, perhaps we were so wrapped up in what we were talking about, but when He asked about our talk about Jesus, we stopped and impatiently said: “Well where have You been? There’s no way You could be from around here and not know about what happened to Jesus.”

We kind of acted not only surprised but even a little rude to Him (at first) because He seemed so casual about what we were talking about. It’s just that we had been hoping that Jesus was the true Messiah of our people.

He asked us to talk more about this and seemed genuinely interested so we started to share with Him what we had been talking about. As we were sharing our thoughts and experiences, He listened respectfully, pensively. We walked along and told Him how Jesus was a mighty prophet, a teacher Who communicated so that anyone could understand (if they wanted to.)

I explained how He could make the Scriptures say something about our every-day relationships with other people and how He even helped our own marriage. I told Him how everything Jesus said seemed to be of God, and how everything He did, was the same: the miracles, the intense personal concern for anyone with whom He was talking. Everyone had sensed that Jesus was so extraordinary, that He must be the redeemer of the people of Israel.

We told Him how the chief priests and temple officers deliberately got Jesus into trouble with Pilate and had Him crucified. We said He was the very One Who had been healing the sick and getting more and more people to start worshipping God

again. He caused people to feel more worshipful instead of only going through all the motions and rituals.

We told Him how Jesus was killed and how we had hoped He was the One Who was going to get our people out from under the captivity of the Romans. We explained how Mary Magdalene, Salome, and the other Mary had found an empty tomb this morning. And we talked of their visions that none of us believed. (Did you know that Peter and John even went to the cemetery to check on their story but only found the empty tomb?)

We related to Him that none of us understood what was going on. It was all so confusing and bewildering. Just hearing ourselves talk about all this made us even more depressed as we walked along. And now, with His death being only the day before yesterday, all that we had hoped for had been crushed.

At that point in the conversation I didn't feel like talking anymore about it because it all seemed so painful and depressing.

Do you know what the man said to us after all that? He looked at us and said that He was surprised that we didn't see all this from what our Scriptures said.

We said "What?"

He said that we should have anticipated some of these things because of what was in the law and the prophets. And then He repeated scores of Scriptural passages to us by memory – verses expecting the Messiah to suffer for the people. He sure knew His stuff, so right off I figured He must be a rabbi. This Jewish Brother explained to us one verse after another – showing us how all of this in Jesus' life had been foretold.

And you know, when we first started out, I didn't think He knew anything at all about Jesus. As He was talking, though, I remembered back to when I was in 5th grade in Synagogue school, when our rabbi read to our class some 456 verses that predicted specific things about the coming of the Messiah. I had forgotten about all those

references.

The Traveler mentioned the Isaiah verse about how the virgin was going to conceive. And I remembered those months of uncertainty my brother Joseph had and the stories of the angels and God's Spirit being with Mary before they were married.

He quoted the passages from Psalms which predicted how it would be a male child, reigning forever, just as was promised to King David. He even reminded me from 2nd Samuel how the Messiah would be a descendent of David's line and I knew that our family was of the Davidic clan.

It was in Micah about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem and you and I both remember hearing about them camping out in that donkey stall for those first few days when the inns were filled up in town. Jesus grew up in hard times, just like Isaiah said. Remember how Joseph and Mary always had to work hard to make ends meet? I guess we all did.

Well, this Traveler was familiar with all of Jesus' teachings. He connected them with the Deuteronomy prediction that the Messiah would be like Moses, a prophet. And as Isaiah said: "He would bring light to those living in darkness."

Remember how Jesus came into Jerusalem last week on a donkey and everyone seemed to get caught up in the celebration? Well, that was predicted by Zechariah long before. Zechariah also told how the Good Shepherd would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.

It was Hosea who predicted that He would be the ransom that would purchase people's lives for God. And Zechariah also talked of how the followers of the Messiah would be scattered and dismayed, and certainly we all have been. He said: "Just as Moses held up the serpent in the wilderness to save our people, so too the Messiah had to be lifted up on the cross in order for us to be saved."

The Traveler even pointed out how the details of the crucifixion were imaged in the past, the suffering, the pierced limbs, the gambling for the clothing. All that was hinted about back in David's Psalms.

He explained about how all our traditions of the altar sacrifices were just to remind us of the one sacrifice of the Messiah Himself for our sins. He reminded us that all of our heritage looked forward to the time when the Messiah would be the go-between for us and God, making possible our getting right with the Lord. All the ritual cleansings and washings were to be replaced by the baptism of the Spirit of God that Jesus had brought to us. The more He explained these things, the more excited we felt inside.

Did you know that in Isaiah it even said that He'd be placed in a tomb of a wealthy man and sure enough, Joseph of Aramathea donated his family tomb? Isaiah even said the Messiah would rise again from the dead and Jesus had told us this Himself but at the time, we didn't comprehend it.

From the very first, the Man was right. We had been slow to believe all the prophecies the Scriptures contained. We had completely forgotten all of the teachings with which we had been brought up – especially the oracles about the Messiah. I guess we had been so close to the horror of the crucifixion that we had taken our minds off of what Jesus had said all these years.

Well, by the time the Traveler had finished reviewing the teachings of our own heritage, we were coming into Emmaus here, and it appeared that He was going on further. We invited Him to come and stay with us tonight, since it was getting dark. I figured He could stay on the spare cot in the living room.

You know, all along the way we had been so concerned with our own experiences over the weekend and with what He had to say, that we never even thought to ask Him His name or introduce ourselves to Him – even though we had spent the evening walking together. You know how I usually am around strangers, particularly at night. We forgot even the common courtesy to exchange names but I guess it doesn't matter.

But we were just going to get to that, as you were getting the roast, when He stood up here and started saying grace for our dinner. Our guest,

instead of waiting for us to do it, started talking with God – thanking God for the food and the fellowship. We were a little surprised that He didn't wait for us – the hosts, to offer the thanks.

But as we listened to Him pray, we heard Him talk to God as if He was talking to Someone right next to us. It was an intimate, peaceful, conversation just like Jesus did when He prayed in our midst. And when He finished the prayer, He was smiling at us.

It was then that I was finally going to say that I didn't catch His name on the road. But at this point, He reached over to the plate and picked up a piece of the bread, still looking at us, and He broke off two pieces and said: "The peace of the Lord is with you today." There were the nail prints in His hands. And He disappeared.

It was Jesus. Jesus had taught us to pray like that, to God Who is as a parent to us – sitting near us. Just last week, Jesus told us that through Him we'd have fellowship, a relationship with God and how that was going to happen by Him being broken, like bread is broken for us.

We sensed a closeness on the road and at the table, here, we felt the same kind of closeness that we had always had with Jesus in our midst.

Jesus is alive and He has been with us all along our walk. And when He broke that bread, it was like a sudden clap of thunder and an opening of a door and we realized it was Him.

You know, on the road, we both sensed that this was Someone truly great. Everything He said made us tremble with interest. I don't know why I didn't recognize Him, His voice, maybe we were in shock from the weekend. But we were beginning to feel warm inside, just listening to Him, like we felt before when He would be teaching us.

Now we're feeling sort of foolish because all these things He had told us before – but we just hadn't bothered to put it all together for ourselves, almost as if we had been letting someone else do our thinking for us. I've been too busy worrying about the kids and the mortgage payments on our business,

to see that right in our midst – even among our own relatives – was the Messiah of Israel. I was so concerned with how my shop was going and then all of the tragedy of this weekend, that I had completely forgotten everything Jesus told us.

But you know, that's just like Jesus. He met with us along the way like that, stayed with us and came along on the trip just for us. It's just like Him to take the time to explain to us again what we should have seen for ourselves. And after His death, in returning, He didn't come down Main street in Jerusalem in a big chariot with trumpet players and banners and make a big production out of it.

He didn't show up in the Sanhedrin and scare those temple rulers to death. He stayed as He has always been, taking the time to walk with us and listen to us. And we were so withdrawn and concerned with ourselves.

It was just like Jesus to go out of His way and become a part of our lives, involved with where we were and what we were doing. I know it's the middle of the night. The roads are hazardous but lets go back to Jerusalem. We all should go back and tell the others we've seen Jesus.

You know, it should have dawned on me, a few months back when we heard Peter say (outright) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I had forgotten about all those times He had mentioned that He would be slain like the rejected son in His parables. How He would be like the stone that was thrown out by the building contractors, only to end up as the chief corner stone. I had put all that out of my mind.

I guess I put aside so much of His teachings and was more concerned with what I thought should be happening. But it's just like Jesus, even though we missed the point, for Him to come after us and explain it again and again.

He is risen from the dead and has taken the time to continue to be the same person He always was and always will be. It seems that in our disbelief, and our doubting, God is always

personally calling us. God has been trying to remind us about what was said in the Scriptures and yet we so easily forget. But Jesus is alive and is calling us. Through Jesus we have come to know the truth, that now we can live with a purpose for the remainder of our years and we can live forever with Him after death.” 🙏