

## The Emmaus Road is a Two-Way Street

[Text - Luke 24:13-35]

Pastor Dave Shackle

April 23, 2017

Let me begin by acknowledging that the inability of Jesus' followers to recognize him, as he meets them on the road to Emmaus, seems pretty strange. Even stranger, they still don't get who he is after he engages them in a lengthy conversation about *himself*! So perhaps the first thing this story tells us, is that it's extremely hard to open someone's eyes - or heart - with a theological discourse. Of course I realize that a *sermon* may not be the best place to raise this particular point! Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are times when we're so busy talking about "Sacred Things," that we completely miss Life's "Sacred Moments." Like Cleopas and his companion, we're so focused on our own interpretations of who the Christ is, what Christ's life and death might mean, or who Christ truly welcomes, that we fail to welcome the Christ who walks among us.

Maybe if those two had been able to set-aside their anxiety about what had happened, what it all meant, and what might happen *next* - they could have appreciated what was happening in that very moment. And maybe, these same kind of things hinder *our* perceiving the Christ among us: when we're impatient with those who disrupt our routine; or when we're so preoccupied with our own thoughts and agendas, that we fail to take time - or make room - for those special individuals who God sends our way. We can end-up missing that Sacred Presence, because It comes to us in ways - or through people - that we consider intrusive, or insignificant. We forget Christ's essential teaching, that "Whatever you do to the *least* of these, my brothers and sisters, you do unto me!"

Unfortunately, those two travelers are so focused on their own concerns, that they can't even begin to grasp what Jesus is telling them. Fortunately however, the message of Jesus Christ isn't limited to *words*! In fact, it's an *action* that finally opens the eyes and hearts of those travelers - which probably shouldn't surprise us. Jesus Christ comes to convey the awesome message of Divine welcome and love for *all* people. Yet he realizes that *words* simply won't suffice; therefore, Jesus takes action!

He lovingly reaches-out to tax-collectors and prostitutes. He compassionately embraces the outcast and the oppressed. He warmly welcomes sinners and strangers. He feeds the hungry, heals the sick, and breaks bread with those who society and religion routinely push-aside. Jesus makes it his Life's mission to assure that every person understands that she or he is a loved and valued child of the Holy One. And when the religious and political power-brokers try to stop him, Jesus willingly gives-up his life - trusting that from that selfless action, the boundless nature of Divine Compassion and Grace, will be fully revealed and finally recognized.

On that first Easter evening, as they sit at the table in Emmaus, Jesus Christ once again takes *action*! He takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them. And then, their eyes are opened. Then they see; then they remember; then they know, that Christ is truly with them! And then...he vanishes from their sight! So now it's time for *them* to take action. They get-up, and hurry back to Jerusalem, to tell the others what has happened. Those two travelers do a complete turn-around. On the Road to Emmaus, their walk is slow and heavy; full of doubt and despair. Yet on that same Road heading back to Jerusalem, their pace is quick and light; full of hope and tremendous joy! Once they recognize that the Risen Christ - seen or unseen - truly is with them, they can't wait to hit the road and share the Good News.

And that's precisely what we desire from our time of worship today:

That when this service is over, the real *service* continues!

That we take the energy, joy, and Good News that we experience here, and carry it with us into our daily living. That you and I embody and convey an inclusive, Divine Love - not merely through our words, but mostly through our actions.

And that we warmly welcome others to join us on this journey of faith - trusting that the Risen Christ is with us, every step of the way!

Two weeks ago at our Leadership Development workshop, we identified the area of "Welcome and Growth" as being a key focus for us moving forward. We also recognized that who we are and what we do as a Faith Community, coalesces quite nicely - and naturally - with the area of "Welcome and Growth". As a church, we offer remarkably *Good News*, in a world that often seems inundated with bad news. We offer a wonderfully positive and supportive community, in a time of deep social division and disconnect. We work together to feed the hungry, help the poor, encourage and educate children of immigrants, stand together for peace and social justice - at a time when many seek to underfund or undermine these critical issues.

Our Congregation's 200 year history includes radically progressive positions - and actions - on behalf of the eradication of slavery, racial equality, the advancement of women's rights, and the extravagant welcome of LGBTQ people. The kind of issues that this Church has embraced, and continues to embrace, are both relevant and important to many of the people around us today. And the better we can inform these people of our on-going commitment to "the least of these, our sisters and brothers" the better the odds of their joining our efforts - and potentially joining our Church.

At this morning's Coffee Hour, we're going to have some conversations about how we can improve and increase our efforts of reaching-out to the community around us. Talking about these things is certainly important; yet it's only a first step. Taking *action* is the crucial component, as Jesus constantly shows us. And just as I've always been in profound awe of the remarkable things Jesus did, I'm also passionately inspired by the amazing things this Community of Faith has done - and will keep-on doing - in Jesus' name.