

SERMON TITLE- "Meeting Jesus Again"

TEXT- Luke 24:13-35

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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DATE- April 26, 2009

The weeks after Easter continue to tick away. The highest point of the Christian year- and in fact, for those who lived through it—all of history has become a memory.

Last week we looked at the question, “What does it mean now?” Once the big event of the resurrection was past a new life with that reality began to define itself.

For the past 3 years Jesus’ disciples knew what their life was about- it was about following Jesus around the countryside and essentially having one great adventure after another. Even with all the unknowns of life on the road with Jesus, there was a deep security that Jesus gave those who followed Him.

The instruction “follow me” did not end on Easter—but what was clear was—everything was now different.

Their dreams of the Kingdom had been exploded.

Their expectations about “tomorrow” had vanished.

Their hopes for personal glory were shattered.

Easter with its resurrection meant that all was not lost—of course—but when everything changes so radically there is an acclimatization process that is necessary. The 50 days between Easter and the next big event in the Christian calendar, Pentecost, was one part of that acclimatization process.

A specific aspect of this season was meeting Jesus again. The first meeting with Jesus for the disciples was the one we understand best. Jesus walked through the countryside and upon encountering people He would issue a His challenge, “Follow Me.”

We can imagine such a meeting even if we might also wonder how they actually decided to leave everything and go and follow Him. And we can understand this meeting because it is the normal kind of meeting that we know about. We might even conclude that if Jesus were to drop by on a journey through Nanaimo, we too would pack up and follow Him.

That might indeed be the case and many did just that. They followed and in the next 3 years those who followed came to know this Man.

But with Easter things changed. The Man they thought they knew—as amazing as He was with His healings, and personality and miracles—was now a Man who had risen from the dead. That is not normal.

Not only this—but He did not have a body in the regular sense of the word. Jesus could now appear and disappear. 40 days after Easter, Jesus, in any kind of physical sense would be gone forever.

But during these 40 days the disciples would go through a process of meeting Jesus all over again.

There is something in these meetings that you and I do well to pay careful attention to because, unlike the 3 years during which Jesus walked around ancient Israel as a teacher, the meetings that took place followed a pattern that is similar to what people for the past 2000 years have experience.

Before we look at a specific story—there is one background fact that we need to clarify. It is about the nature of God and people.

We believe that God is the Creator of the cosmos.

We believe that humans are part of that creation.

If this is true then it seems self-evident that the created being will be incapable of comprehending the Creator.

It also seems to be self-evident that if we are to have any insight into who this God is—it will depend on God revealing Himself to us. This is expressed in an interesting way in the Bible:

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 29:13-14

We are not passive in this, at all, but the Bible is also clear that knowing about God is not merely about sitting down and figuring things out. Know God is dependant on an encounter with Him. We must meet Him.

In the days after Easter this happened in a variety of ways. Today’s story is one of them.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

Luke 24:13-16

#1. Life Goes On

No matter how dramatic an event is—life has a way of taking over. The bills need to be paid, the laundry needs doing, breakfast needs preparing and all those things require someone to work and make money.

Quickly in the days that followed Easter life just had to resume its old rhythms. In this case, for these 2 men life was resuming its rhythm very quickly. This was still what we now call Easter Sunday. They had already heard stories of Jesus’ appearance but even in that context—life was rolling along.

In pre industrial culture that rhythm involved walking. This was something that I came to be in touch with on the Everest trek. We were transported back into a culture where walking was the way to get around.

The mark of a walking culture is that you walk and talk.

These 2 disciples were doing just that. They were sorting out what it was all about—as they walked along.

#2. The Rhythm Of Life Puts Blinders On Us

This is one of the features of being human. The patterns that we fall into make us see things certain ways—even if the evidence isn’t there.

For the disciples walking and talking as they were so used to doing meant that they failed to see something very obvious—Jesus was walking and talking with them. I

wonder if these 2 disciples were not of the inner core. They were not among the 12 and may have been even farther from the centre.

If this is the case it is possible that they had never walked and talked with Jesus but knew Him primarily from the big gatherings and crowds. Meeting Jesus walking down the road and talking to Him in that context may well have been something that they were just not used to.

The principle that daily life puts blinders on us- has a big implication in the matter of very important spiritual issues. The daily rhythm of life has a way of making us look right past some very obvious and important issues.

Inside of every person I have ever talked to about it—there is a search for meaning.

When we are walking down the road—even when we are talking about that search for meaning—in reality the things that really concern us are:

-whether our shoes fit well or we have blisters

-if we are tired or invigorated

-whether or not the conversation we are having is interesting

Even while we are talking about the meaning of life that is not necessarily our inner concern.

And what took place as they were walking along? Jesus appears along side of them.

And this is one of those things about Jesus that has marked the past 2000 years:

#3. Jesus Has A Way Of Appearing In Our Lives

One of the most fascinating aspects of talking to people about their faith journeys is hearing stories of how Jesus appears. This is something that keeps confirming the principle that God must reveal Himself for us to encounter Him. And to me it only seems right that He should reveal Himself to everyone.

And so when I have a chance to talk to people about it—I do. It is of course the easiest to talk about this to people who already have faith—but from time to time I have had a chance to catch people who are not believers with their guards down and I sometimes have a chance to ask them if they have ever experience God’s call on their lives.

When I ask that question I often get a strange and slightly uncomfortable look that seems to me to indicate that while they don’t like to think about it—there were times when God did seem to be reaching out to them.

And it is in this context that this stories tells us something else I think is very interesting.

#4. Jesus Meets Us On The Road When We Aren’t Paying Attention

I find this very encouraging. There are people who seem to be naturally “spiritual.” I always found this a little intimidating probably because I am one of those people for whom that routine and excitement of life easily overrides “spiritual” concerns.

Some years ago there were stories of Christian leaders who seemed to have an enormous drive for things such as fasting and prayer. This is not my natural state. If that is what it takes to be a good pastor, I quickly concluded, I have a lot of catching up to do.

And so it is that stories like Jesus meeting these 2 men while they are getting on with life, and missing who was with them, even as He talked to them—is something I relate to.

And the story carries on:

*He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"
They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"
"What things?" he asked.*

Luke 24:17-19

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Luke 24:20-24

And what do we see here?

#5. Jesus Invites Our Questions

These 2 men had a whole package of questions and not surprisingly. The trademark of Jesus is that He challenges virtually everything we think we know. Later Paul would say it like this:

For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:22-24

Paul is talking about the presentation of Christianity and its challenge but the challenge is there because even in the person and message of Jesus there are deep challenges with how things are and feel to us.

Those who meet Jesus will have questions and that is the way it is supposed to be. But Jesus listens and asks questions that further draws these men out.

- Jesus was a prophet. What does that mean?
- Jesus did miracles. How does that work?
- Jesus was hated. Why and why didn't He defend Himself?
- Jesus rose from the dead. That goes beyond everything.

Those who know about the Jesus of the Bible and don't have questions have not, in my opinion, understood the story.

We should have question and we should ask them and Jesus listens.

But don't assume that you are really asking. A lot of what we put out as questions are actually statements and opinions we hold. That of course is fine but the process of actually asking

But it doesn't stop there.

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

Luke 24:25-27

#6. There Answers If—We Actually Ask

It's easy to ask questions and in fact with a little practice you and I can learn to listen to and honour others who ask questions. There is an immense amount of good that comes from honestly asking and carefully listening to questions.

But actually having answers is a whole other dimension.

Jesus' answer comes in 2 parts. First, He challenges them on the fact that there are some things that they should have known. There are times when we have things seriously mixed up and when we do- it is a good thing to have that straightened out. There were aspects of the blindedness of the disciples that was inexcusable. They were foolish!

Now being called foolish is a tough thing but one thing that is clear from this context Jesus' challenge to them is done from a place of love. If we are being foolish we might as well hear what we need to hear so that we don't keep going down the same miserable road again and again. Jesus doesn't pull any punches.

But secondly, Jesus goes on to actually explain things again. From the context I would take it that much if not all of the things He was telling them had been explained before—but the reality of it was now that Easter was past the disciples had a whole new view of the world.

As I get older and read the books of my childhood again—I see things I never saw before. I regularly find myself saying, "Oh now I get it!"

Having further life experiences makes something suddenly make sense.

And Jesus explained the whole OT story to His disciples, again. He answered their questions.

And some of the answers He gave are ones only He can give. This is an area where we shouldn't try to emulate Him. We will have stop with relatively modest answers.

But it should not surprise us that Jesus, if indeed He is the Son of God and as that the Creator of the cosmos, would have answers to our questions.

One thing that the Bible consistently teaches is that the cosmos, because it is created by God, is orderly and therefore there is an underlying logic to the universe and even to the ways of God.

All of this is captured by the word "logos" or "logic." But we will leave exploring that for another time.

Now one thing that is clear as well is- that just because Jesus has all the answers doesn't mean that we are ready or able to understand them. In fact one of the big problems we have is that we ask questions that need to be shaken out. In theological terms I think a lot of our questions are like "What colour is three?" In other words they contain assumptions that need sorting out. There's no reason why a number couldn't have a colour but on the other hand there is also good reason to think that these are simply not matched sets,

But even for our questions that need clarification themselves, Jesus listens and I believe helps us sort things like this out.

And this leads to the last point for today:

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

Luke 24:28-29

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 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?"

Luke 24:30-32

#7. Jesus Makes Sure We Get It

To me this is a great place to end with real celebration. The journey through our questions is a long and complicated one. It is complicated because Jesus, as God's Son is beyond simplistic human comprehension. Figuring out our questions, itself is a journey for our lives.

And secondly it is a complicated journey because we are complicated. Our quest for insight is not a pure search for truth- it is mixed with all kinds of impulses. And yet Jesus stays on the road with us- until we get it.

In this short story the journey is compressed but in the Bible, the Book of Job is the expanded version of a man's search but the bottom line of the Book of Job is this:

- Job has a lot of questions and cries out to God
- God listens
- God speaks to God
- Job gets it

That, I believe is the pattern that God has set out from the beginning—and remains there for us today.

And the story end the way almost all the Gospel stories end:

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Luke 24:33-35

Those who met Jesus go on to tell others.