

¹³ That same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ 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?" ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ 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. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So Jesus went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. ³² 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?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:13-35

05/07/2023 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Made Known"

Rev. Amy Terhune

It was Saturday morning in mid-November, and Jake, an avid hunter, woke up raring to go bag the first deer of the season. He went downstairs to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee, and to his surprise he found his wife Alice sitting there, fully dressed in camouflage.

Alice smiled and said, "It's so hard to find time to do things together, so if it's alright with you, I thought I'd go hunting with you!"

Jake had many reservations about this plan, but does one explain them to one's wife...

"Great, honey!"

Which is how it came to pass that two hours later they arrived at a game preserve not too far from their home. Jake set his lovely wife safely up in the tree stand and told her, "If you see a deer, take careful aim on it and I'll come running back as soon as I hear the shot." Then he walked away with a smile on his face knowing that Alice couldn't bag an elephant - much less a deer.

But not 10 minutes later, Jake was startled by the sound of gunshots.

He started running back towards the tree stand where he'd left his wife. As he got closer, he could hear Alice screaming, "Get the heck away from my doggone deer!"

Alarmed, Jake raced faster towards his screaming wife.

And again he heard her yell, "I said get the heck away from my doggone deer!" followed by another volley of gunfire!

Now within sight of where he had left his wife, Jake was surprised to see the game warden with his hands high in the air.

The game warden, obviously distraught, yelled, "Okay, lady! You can have your doggone deer, just...uh...let me get my saddle off of it!" [traditional humor, original source unknown. You'll find several versions of this joke if you Google it.]

Now, les you wonder why I would begin a sermon with a story like that, I'll tell you: it's a ridiculous and hopefully humorous way to demonstrate how we sometimes see what we expect to see rather than what is. Alice expected to see deer, not a horse. She acted accordingly.

And several thousand years before, two disciples on the road to Emmaus never recognized Jesus in their midst. Why? Because they didn't expect him. The women had gone to the tomb that morning with spices and salves, expecting to anoint the dead. Instead they encountered life, and returned to the upper room where the disciples were hiding with rejoicing and breathless wonder. But the other disciples wrote it off as an 'idle tale'.

I'm sure that one of those unnamed disciples was a man named Cleopas. It stands to reason that he was hiding out with the others. Or at the very least, he was close, because he knows what the women saw that morning. I wonder what he was thinking about that morning, when a bunch of breathless, excited, astonished women returned to the room with talk of angels and empty tombs. Did it grate on his nerves? Was it too much to bear? Was it the straw that broke the camel's back? There's no way to know, of course, but I wonder: what made him pack his bags and head for Emmaus that day? Maybe it was business, completely unrelated—but I suspect not. And from what I've read, most scholars suspect not. And so the scene is set for one of the most beloved stories in all of scripture.

There's something about the road to Emmaus that speaks to the deepest parts of our spirits. Luke is masterful storyteller, drawing us in to suffer alongside those two souls on the road. We are all too aware of how easy it can be to fail to see Christ beside us in tough times. We know firsthand how hard it is to see what is impossible and to expect the unexpected. We see what we expect to see. Which is why we feel for these two plodding through the desert on a hopeless trip back to the last known point in their life when things made sense. And even though we know what they do not, we still experience the same inner glow as they discover Christ in their midst—the same awe and wonder. That's because Luke fully intends that we enter the story ourselves. That why he doesn't name the other disciple that walks with Cleopas. My friends, we are that unnamed disciple on the road. You and I are meant to step into those shoes; to enter the despair they felt; to walk along rehearsing and rehashing the injuries that we have witnessed and sustained in our recent past.

But what happens? Pay attention here. These two are broken and demoralized when a stranger suddenly breaks into the scene. Of course, you and I know what they do not. This is no stranger. They didn't expect to see Jesus, and so their eyes failed to recognize him. But we know this is Jesus, the Risen Christ!

The good news is that in "stuckness"—in our defeats—Christ comes looking for us. We don't have to go out and find God. God is searching us out on the byways and detours down which our defeats invariably lead us. He enters our humanity. He breaks into the downward spirals that pitfall the landscape of human experience. He comes to get us "un-stuck". How? He listens. He lets these disciples tell their story. He engages them in conversation: what are you discussing with each other

while you walk along? Now, look at what Cleopas and his companion say to Jesus: "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" Does anyone else sense the extraordinary irony in this question? I mean, think about it!

Of all the people in Jerusalem—heck, of all people in the *world*—Jesus knows better than anyone just exactly what has taken place there in these days, and why. But these two wanderers on the road are stuck—they're stuck in the past, stuck in their mindset, stuck in their own overwhelming grief. Listen to how they describe Jesus of Nazareth to the stranger on the road: He was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. They've seen Jesus do amazing stuff—feed thousands on a hillside, heal lepers and blind men and hemorrhaging women, best the religious leaders in debate at the temple square, turn lives around that had been broken, marginalized, hopeless. But what are they talking about as they walk along? Not his life or his teachings, but his death—the tragedy of it, the wrongness of it, the demise of all their dreams for their people and their nation. If they had simply taken time to celebrate his life and his message, might they have realized that this is far from over? Might they have remembered what he said, what he taught, what he promised? We'll never know, because they're stuck in that last week, reliving the suffering over and over. All they saw was defeat.

Jesus breaks into their pain and their "stuck-ness" (for lack of a better word). I call that grace, but you can call it whatever you want. But it's always the first thing Jesus gives us—grace. Grace is the continual lubricant in the cogs of time. It enables us to move on, you see. To start over. It awakens a hunger for a new vision. And every now and then, we're given a chance to see what we don't expect to see. Which is essentially what happens.

Jesus opens the story of their won people. "You are looking for the redemption of Israel? Okay, let's start with Moses, who led our people out of slavery." In order for those two disciples to realize Christ was in their midst, Christ had to first open their eyes to the truth; the reality of the situation—that there was more than one way to understand and frame the events that had taken place that week. But they don't get it. Or so writes Bill Ritter. Listen to how he puts it:

Jesus falls in step with them. The three of them talk. About hopes raised. And hopes dashed. About confrontations ... condemnations ... crucifixions ... and unsubstantiated rumors of resurrections. Them complaining. Him explaining. But nothing connecting.

Until the village gets near... the day gets short... and they get hungry. He appears to be going further. Don't miss this little detail. Jesus is always going further. Jesus may companion our journey, but Jesus is not bound by our agenda. Most of the time, we want to stop before he does.

They say: "Stay and eat with us." Which he does. And while he is at their table... as their guest... responding to their invitation... he takes, blesses, breaks, gives, and "they recognize him in the breaking of bread." Then, suddenly, he isn't there anymore. But that glimpse is enough. Enough for them to look back down the road they have already come... back down the steps they have already taken... back down the stories they have already told... back down the history they have already lived... so as to enable them to say: "It was the Lord... all along. And there were signs. But we missed them... 'Til now." [from "Get Real" by William A. Ritter, www.esermons.com.]

We see what we expect to see. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus surprised us. He has opened our minds to a new interpretation of scripture and a new vision of what victory looks like, and that's when everything shifts. Despair topples. Hope rises. He has taught us to expect something altogether new. Breaking bread ceases to be merely a memorial. It becomes a reunion. It becomes a promise. It becomes wisdom. Christ is made known in the breaking—the breaking into our pain and stuck-ness, the breaking open of ancient story, the breaking light of a new day. And Christ is made known in our brokenness—encouraging, enriching, healing, and holding.

One of the most gifted theologians of the 20th century was a woman named Georgia Harkness. She was born in 1891, and "...was educated Cornell University, Boston University, Yale Divinity School, Union Theological Seminary, and Harvard Divinity School. She was articulate, dynamic, and had a deep love for Christ and for Christ's people. From the time she was a young woman, even before WWI erupted, she wanted more than anything else to serve the church as a preacher, pastor, and leader. But the Methodist church did not ordain women. Despite real prejudice and utter condescension from her male colleagues, she taught applied theology at several institutions, including Garrett School of Theology and Pacific School of Religion. Ahead of her time, Harkness debated Karl Barth in 1948 at the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam on the topic of the equality of women. She tirelessly strove to change the church's stance on the ordination of women."

[adapted/extracted from C. Michael Hawn, <http://www.gbod.org/lead-your-church/history-of-hymns/resource/history-of-hymns-hope-of-the-world.>]

In 1954, she penned the words we sang in our opening hymn this morning: Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways, showing to wandering souls the path of light; bringing to hungry souls the bread of life. She knew all about feeling defeated, stuck, written off, and belittled. She was told over and over again she didn't belong. She knew about disappointment and broken dreams. She walked that road to Emmaus more than once. But she also knew the Hope of the World. And so it was that in 1956, at 65 years of age, when most of her friends were retiring and stepping back, Georgia Harkness was among the first after the General Conference of the Methodist Church finally approved the ordination of women to stand in a pulpit with a stole over her shoulders and finally share, as that unnamed disciples had all those centuries before, how she had encountered Christ afoot on dusty highways, and how he had been made known to her in the breaking of the bread. Thanks be to God. Amen.