

Scripture Lesson: Luke 24:13-35*Pew Bible N.T. pg. 84-85*

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

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 24:13-35

05/04/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"How Far from Here to Hope?"

Rev. Amy Terhune

"You may have heard the story of "Wrong Way Riegels"? It's a familiar one, but well worth repeating. On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played UCLA in the Rose Bowl. In that game a young man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for UCLA. Picking up the loose ball, he got turned around, lost his direction, and ran sixty-five yards toward the wrong goal line. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, ran him down and tackled him just before he reached the end zone. UCLA was forced to punt. Georgia Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, demoralizing the UCLA team.

“Well, that strange play came just before the end of the first half. At halftime the UCLA players filed off the field and into the locker room. They sat around on benches and the floor. But Riegels put a blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, and put his face in his hands.

“A football coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during halftime, but that day, Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. When the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time, the coach looked at the team and said, “Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second.”

“The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He didn't budge. The coach looked back and called to him. Riegels didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, “Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second.”

“Roy Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet with tears. “Coach,” he said, “I can't do it. I've ruined you. I've ruined the university's reputation. I've ruined myself. I can't face that crowd out there.”

“Coach Price reached out, put his hands on Riegels' shoulder, and said, “Roy, get up and get back out on that field. The game is only half over.” [6 ¶s from Leadership, Spring 1992, “To Illustrate,” page 49; as used in “Halftime Is Now Over” by Eric. S. Ritz, www.Sermons.com.]

I suspect that these two disciples, or perhaps we should call them ex-disciples, that we meet on the road this morning felt a lot like Roy Riegels did. That is, they felt defeated, like they couldn't do it anymore, like everything was ruined—their lives, their hopes, their reputations. Now, I can't say for certain what's going on, but I do know this much: Peter and James and John and all of them are back in Jerusalem, hiding out in the upper room, trying to make sense of the things that are happening. How far have we come? Well, it's still Easter day! Remember, we linger on that first Easter for a couple of weeks at this time of year. It's only been a few hours since the women showed up in a frenzy of excitement to tell them that Christ had risen. They're all bewildered, in shock, apparently suffering from complete amnesia about everything that Jesus tried to tell them before he died. But these two followers aren't staying with the group. They're headed to Emmaus. This whole bizarre story about an empty tomb and angelic visitors—it's too much, on top of their already heavy grief. They've given up—at least, that's my take on it.

A couple of things in that text draw my attention. One is Cleopas and his unnamed companion. Some say it's his wife and that's why she isn't named, and that could be true. But then again, Luke tends to talk more about the women who followed Jesus than anyone else. Luke isn't squeamish about including women. I think it's more likely that I am the unnamed disciple. Or you. The point being that we're supposed to understand ourselves as being on the road; to put ourselves in their shoes and feel that sense of loss and defeat, the better to understand the hope that Jesus ultimately represents.

And then there's Emmaus. Don't let a tour guide in Israel fool you. Nobody knows for sure where it is. According to R. Alan Culpepper, “the best manuscript tradition says that Emmaus is located sixty stadia from Jerusalem. A stadium was 600 Roman feet, so sixty stadia would be about 7.5 miles. Other manuscripts, however, read 160 stadia, or about 19.5 miles.” [R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections”, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) pg. 475.] There are several possible sites for the ancient city, but still today, no consensus exists among archeologists or scholars as to which site is the right one. How Far is it to Emmaus? Fredrich Buechner adds this insight when he interprets Emmaus as “...the place to go in order to escape—the bar, a movie, whatever... Emmaus may be buying a new suit or a new car or smoking more cigarettes that you really want or reading a second-rate novel or even writing one. Emmaus may even be going to church on Sunday. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas humanity has had—ideas about love and freedom

and justice—have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish people for selfish ends.” [from Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat* (New York: Seabury, 1966) pg. 85-86 in R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections”, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) pg. 482.] You might say that Emmaus is the hometown of every cynic. Maybe that seems a little harsh, but we can at least safely say this much: The story of the unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus (wherever it may be) can be the story of anyone who has ever questioned whether there is cause for hope. And just to preview the end of the sermon: yes, there is cause for hope. Resoundingly so.

And then there’s verse 16: but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Now you could interpret that as God keeping their eyes from recognition, but that’s not a faithful rendering of the Greek. And honestly, why would God want to keep people from recognizing Christ in their midst? No, I think something within them keeps them from recognizing Jesus. They don’t recognize him because they’re stuck in their grief, in their past, in their despair. They don’t recognize him because they’re not looking for him. They don’t recognize him because they don’t realize the game is only half over! 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. All they see is loss and defeat. Sixty-five yards in the wrong direction! How far is it to hope?

I don’t know where you are feeling defeated in life. I don’t know where you might be stuck. I don’t know what possibilities or relationships or dreams you may have written off as impossible—as a place or event where God would surely never show up. I don’t know what piece of your life you’ve written God out of, assuming that God is far too big, too important, too busy, or too holy to make his presence felt. I only know this. If the story of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus tells us anything, it’s that even when we write God off, God never writes us off. When you and I are stuck, lost, defeated, 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.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus has 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. It’s not at the end. Hope is on the road, you see. And Jesus has taught us to expect something altogether new. Breaking bread ceases to be merely a memorial. It becomes a reunion. Christ is made known in the breaking—the breaking into our pain and stuck-ness, the breaking open of ancient story, the breaking of bread. And when that happens, what is worship ceases to be routine and becomes an experience of connection, closeness, presence.

A topic about which the late (and great) Fred Craddock writes with considerable knowledge and genuine sensitivity, so I’ll close with one of his wonderful stories:

“When we were in Europe, in Germany, studying for year, I’d been down to Zürich in Switzerland, several days from my family in another country. I was overwhelmed with a sense of melancholy. I was lonely. I got on the train and grabbed a sandwich. On the German trains, I would usually try to get a place in a compartment where there were already several people so that I could just be at the fringe of the conversation, since my German was not very good. But that compartment was full, the next compartment was full, and the next and so on... Well, in the last compartment there was

one elderly woman. I figured out that if I went in there, that's two which give me 50% of the conversation. Could I handle it? I had no choice." Is this place free?"

"She nodded; I sat down. She was staring out the window. "Nice day." She turned and smiled. I worked up another German sentence, a real profound one like, "Will we get there tonight?" She turned and smiled. "You going home?" She turned and smiled. I thought, *boy I know more German than she does*. I grew more bold and said, "I'm going to Stuttgart." She turned and smiled. I said, "Where are you going?"

She said, "Schwerin." Schwerin? Schwerin was in Communist Germany, the other side (back then), DDR. Communist Germany.

I said, "Are you a communist?"

She said, "No. I am a Christian."

I said, "I'm a Christian." She looked at me. I said, "I'm from America."

She said, "Yes, I know." We began to talk.

And they talked about Germany, and about American, and about faith. And Craddock writes, "I had that sandwich I had bought, and my stomach was growling. I was hungry, but I didn't want to eat my sandwich in front of her. I didn't know what to do. Finally I thought, *I can at least share the sandwich*. Then I ran up against another problem: it was a German sandwich, and the bread was extremely hard. You probably don't know about German sandwiches. I couldn't get in two and I didn't have a knife. I'm breaking it over my knee, trying to get the sandwich in two so I can share, and finally when it broke, I pulled a part of it to hand to her. I hadn't noticed, but in the meantime, she had peeled an orange and was extending to me half as she received half a sandwich. Half a sandwich, half an orange. We talked some more, until we got to Stuttgart.

"God go with you," she said as I disembarked.

And Craddock concludes: "I thought of that old woman today. I wonder if she ever thought of me. Since I was with her, I have been in hundreds of churches, I suppose, and the first thing I do when I go to a church is study the menu. I find it's the same in every church. One half sandwich, one half orange; it's the Christian way. I thought of that old woman today. In fact, I thought about her so much that I got to thinking about how far it is from here to Schwerin, Germany. Do you have any idea how far that is, how many hundreds, how many thousands of miles it is?" Saginaw to Schwerin? Port Huron to Port-au-Prince, Haiti? Marquette to Monrovia, Liberia? Detroit to Damascus? Here to Hope? Do you know how far it is? "I checked the atlas," writes Craddock. "It's across the table. That's how far is it." [preceding story adapted slightly from "Craddock stories" by Fred B. Craddock, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001) pg. 57-58.]

Thanks be to God! Amen.