

1 Sermon, April 22, 2012

Texts: Luke 24:13-35, Acts 18:24-19:7

Title: "Easter Renewal: Emmaus"

1. The Emmaus Story
2. Most important to me is that Jesus builds a desire for God in the heart
3. That desire makes us pay attention – scripture,
4. That desire makes us pay attention to others – Women, disciples
5. That desire makes us want to do more – run back and tell

1. The Emmaus Story

One of the best questions we can ask of a particular piece of scripture is "So what?"

So, Jesus was risen, and on the night after he appeared to the women, he appeared to two disciples who were walking to a village called Emmaus. They didn't recognize him. So what?

Jesus pretended not to understand what they were talking about, but when they talked about Jesus and his death and the strange story of the empty tomb, then Jesus explained it all to them. So what?

Jesus explained the scriptures to these two disciples who were not part of the original 12, and when they came to the village and it was getting to be dark, they invited Jesus to stay with them.

Then, when they sat down at the table and Jesus broke the bread, he suddenly vanished. So – what does that mean for us?

Then those two disciples reflected on how their hearts burned within them when Jesus was explaining the scriptures to them; they had a passionate desire for the things of God.

In fact, they were so excited, they left, even though it was dark, and went back to Peter and the others, and told them what had happened.

What does that mean to us?

2. Most important to me is that Jesus builds a desire for God in the heart

Well, to me what it means is that Jesus walks with us. The resurrected Christ seeks to lead us and teach us.

The single most important thing Jesus did in this passage was to build a desire for God in the hearts of Cleopas and his friend.

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A desire for Christ is a powerful thing.

The desire to have faith is as important as the faith itself.

We may not put enough emphasis on that desire. It's not just the desire to live a good life. It's not the desire to avoid hell or punishment. The desire we're talking about here is to have Christ made real in our lives. Imperfect as we are, we invite Christ to convert our souls and refine our inner being. We are talking about really *wanting* to be in tune with Christ, and God's will for each of us.

There's a contemporary Christian song that has the lyrics in the chorus: "I'm desperate for you." I've never liked that. I'm not desperate! I trust that God will do what God will do. It's all good!

So I don't like that word "desperate." But the word does get at the intensity of desire for Jesus that is hard to talk about in more moderate words.

So this sermon is about Jesus, but even more it is about us *wanting* Jesus with our whole hearts.

Trappist Monk Thomas Merton wrote a prayer about desire that is has become widely known. The prayer reads:

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

3. That desire makes us pay attention – scripture

One of the ways you can see it in the scripture reading itself is that Cleopas and his friend wanted to pay attention. Jesus explained to them the meaning of what we call the Old Testament, and their hearts burned within them.

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They paid *attention* when Jesus opened their minds to the scriptures.

I once went to a lecture by Calvin DeWitt, a scientist and Christian. He spoke of being on a lake with a friend, and some fish jumped.

The friend asked him something like, "What do you think those fish are doing when they jump like that?"

DeWitt replied, "Praising God."

There is so much to pay attention to. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."

One of the people who sees that is Tim Tebow, quarterback recently for the Denver Broncos and now on the New York Jets. Tebow was credited for a turnaround on the Broncos, inspiring his teammates to pull together for one another and achieve beyond their physical gifts.

In other words, they now *believe* in each other, *have faith* in each other, and *trust* each other -- and are simply playing better because of it.

Tim Tebow is a Christian, and very publicly a follower of Jesus. Christianity teaches us to *believe* and *have faith* in God, and to *trust* that God will not only provide for our needs but also bless us in ways our minds cannot fathom.

After games, Tebow will always thank "my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." He will end the post-game interview by telling the reporter: "God Bless."

Tim Tebow has a deep desire to be a follower of Jesus, and that desire is transforming. As Psalm 37 says,

"Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." Psalms 37:3, 4, NRSV.

4. That desire makes us pay attention to others – Women, disciples

That desire for Christ also makes us want to pay attention to others. You can see in this passage that Cleopas and his friend paid attention to

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what the women who had been to the tomb had told the others who followed Jesus. They pondered the message of their friends.

They also rushed back to Jerusalem when Jesus vanished, because they had to share what they had seen, despite the dangers of traveling in darkness.

So, deeply desiring to pay attention to those whom Jesus also loves is central to the Emmaus story, and central to Christian faith.

Mother Teresa said,

"People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway. If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway. For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

The president of Nigeria is a man named Goodluck Jonathan. He is trying to clean up a government that has been involved in corruption, mismanagement and brutality. He has worked for peace in the region. Goodluck Jonathan said recently,

"I fervently believe that as the resurrection of Jesus Christ signifies the triumph of light over darkness, Nigeria will overcome its developmental challenges in the shortest possible time if we all resolve to set aside our differences, work together as one people, and foster peace, harmony and security in our country as requisite conditions for steady socio-economic growth and development," he stated.

You can tell Jonathan's deep desire for the good of all.

5. That desire makes us want to do more – run back and tell

The desire for God; the desire to live like Jesus, the desire for a faith-filled life is contagious. That desire made the Emmaus disciples want to run back and tell their news.

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You can see that kind of desire in the face and voice of a child who sees something truly special.

When our son, Samuel, was three years old, I served as a substitute preacher for two churches near Elkhorn for two months. Samuel came with me and they loved him. I remember how Samuel said to me, "Spring Prairie and Lyons is our church."

He was glad to be with daddy. He was glad for the Spring Prairie organist who gave him skittles, the church people who sat with him, the love that was poured out on him.

He had to tell about it.

Jesus said that unless we change and become like children, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

I think that's partly because children are transparent about their desires; they show what they really want.

I hope you desire faith; I hope you desire to follow Christ in that kind of way.

"Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?" 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but

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they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 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?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 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, NRSV.

"Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus. While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them." Acts 18:24-19:7, NRSV.