

Road Trip

by

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Readings: Luke 24:13-35

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Now...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. ~ Luke 24:13-16

You know, as I do, that our ability to see the truth that may be right in front of us depends as much, if not more, on our readiness to see the “light” as it does on the one who offers to “shine the light.” Wasn’t it Mark Twain who said that after he

graduated from college and went back home he was amazed at how much his father had learned in four years?

How many times have you had an experience of not figuring out right away what was going on in an encounter with another person? Perhaps it was an acquaintance who acted kindly toward you but you didn't think much more about it until the relationship developed and you realized how much you liked and admired this person and valued his or her friendship. The other knew from the first time he met you that you were someone special but it took awhile for you to realize the feeling was mutual.

Or, have you ever had the experience of sitting in class with a gifted teacher who, in effect, explains the key to the subject's universe? But instead of comprehending this from the beginning of the semester it takes you several months of classes to realize that this is the teacher who can communicate the subject matter to you as no other before has. I hope I shall always remember the day I was sitting in a lecture by an architectural historian named Vincent Scully who taught at Yale. I had read several of his books and was captured by his energy this day as he lectured, using slides to illustrate his words. By the end of the hour I was nearly overwhelmed with thoughts and new discoveries, a matter of many years of study coming together. I knew that day what was the golden key to architecture that appeals to the eye: it is all about proportion.

Scully, in his marvelous lectures, had brought that home for me. Of a sudden my eyes were opened and I could see as never before.

I have since met other people, not all of them architects, who had similar responses to professor Scully's teaching. David McCullough, the historian and biographer, says that Scully was the most outstanding teacher he ever heard at Yale. There are others we know who can report their careers taking a turn toward art and design because of encounters with this teacher. Some realized what was happening in his presence sooner than others but all can look back and say, "I remember the day my heart soared as my eyes were opened in his presence."

Sometimes we find ourselves, in the course of our lives, on a journey with another who is so familiar we fail to see how unique that other is and how deeply we have been touched by that one. Life-long friends or family members are often among those in this group. For example, my older brother was known to me from the time I was born to the day he died at age 57. But it wasn't until we were older, he in college and I in high school, that I realized how much I had learned, and was continuing to learn from him, about the society, about ideas, about our family, about our faith in God. He was able to capture my attention, my interest and my respect in a way that others had not. I think if he had told me that there is still some doubt that the world is round I would have considered it for a time.

What intrigues me about all of these I have mentioned, and countless others, is not so much that they had much to reveal to me about the world we live in, but that something was triggered, sometimes sooner, often much later, which allowed me to appreciate the gift of insight and vision that was being shared with me by these wise people. They led the way to revelation but it was still up to me to recognize what was being revealed in order for the connection to be made. Effort was required from each of us.

As I come to the story of Jesus along the road to Emmaus with two disciples, my own experience informs my interpretation of what happened among those people on that day. I used to think of this story only as another indicator of how Christ is revealed to us. But I realize now that there is more to it than that, however significant that revelation is for us. It is also a story that illustrates how God works in our lives to bring us to a moment where we are enabled and motivated to see what we have not seen before for a host of reasons. The good thing is that, regardless of the reason for the insight now, at last we are aware of, say, how God is working in our lives. Or if that is a little too fast a cut to the theological chase for you, let's just say that revelation, seeing what is before us, is as much a matter of *our* activity as it is that of the one making the revelation. I learned about a multitude of matters, from ideas to people, with my brother's guidance, not necessarily because he was so brilliant but because with the eyes of love and a mind that was

fertile I was ready to learn with him as with few others. It was for me a metaphorical breaking of bread, a moment in which I saw the truth.

One of you is probably going to nail me on the way out today saying, in effect, what does all this have to do with Luke 24 and Jesus on the road to Emmaus? As I read the text for this morning it occurs to me that a question soon comes to mind, namely: How is Jesus revealed in our lives today? That is the question that has been rolling around in my mind all week. But as I began to write it occurred to me that the other question is equally, if not more, important: **How are we enabled to see what God has revealed to us along our way?** What are our Upper Room, breaking of bread moments of discovery, like today?

It may not always be pleasant-- this matter of seeing and trying to understand what God is doing in our lives. For example, how will a resident of Tuscaloosa, Alabama make sense of a tornado that destroys the home she had planned to live in through her retirement? Who will be enabled to make sense of thousands of acres of their farmland flooded in Missouri so that a few towns upriver won't be inconvenienced? And who can say that he or she has the appropriate take on the death of Osama bin Laden a week after the news was announced?

We will continue to have blind spots toward that which is right before us. Our prayer is that, in time, we will be open to

insight and understanding so that we might go forward with a reasonable perspective on unfolding events. Our prayer as Christian people is that we will be given the gift of insight to see what God is revealing to us and our world. Those were our prayers after 9/11 and they continue to be our prayers ten years later as disaster and hardship and warring dictators rise and fall on a weekly basis. Our prayer becomes a mantra: God help us to see and to comprehend what Thou hast wrought in our world.

As I make my halting way toward retirement I too find myself hoping that our home for those years will not be blown away by a hurricane, that for most of those years I will be able to keep climbing the stairs, that the community will not change too quickly so that the predictable comfort it offers will not be disturbed as I sit in my library with the books I love.

And then we hear from dear friends in New England who live not far from us that their sixteen month effort to adopt an eleven year-old girl in Haiti is about to be resolved. It appears that after countless delays she will be on her way to them in a matter of weeks! This is a family already has four children, ages kindergarten to high school. They live on a small farm compound near the coast which provides a home as well as office and studio space for the parents to work at their occupations. They have several horses, a mule, some chickens, at least three new lambs, some rabbits and a Bernese Mountain dog. This homestead is undergirded by family love and

maintained at a high level of activity and intellectual curiosity. It should be no surprise that these are the folks who would reach out to a child in Haiti, go there to visit and seek to rescue her, an orphan. We are so pleased for them that this long-awaited moment is about to be realized.

But I am also aware that my resilience to new and unpredicted developments among people I know and care about is being stretched in a good way. Their readiness to take on a new challenge reminds me that I can always add to my openness to move beyond the familiar, to look for ways to view the world from someone else's perspective, to embrace discomforting revelation with the expectation that I will make new discoveries, meet new friends, and, who knows, even find myself confronted anew by God in Christ. Jesus breaks bread before us in the most unexpected places.

As it was for those two disciples, there is a greater journey before each of us if we will but seek it and declare ourselves ready to travel. Who knows what may be revealed, and seen, and recognized even by the likes of you and me?

Thanks be to God.