

“SONRISE IN MOURNING BRINGS END TO GRAVE PROBLEM”

Message for the Third Sunday of Easter

From Pastor Norman Staker

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ACTS 2: 14A, 36-41 ✱ 1 PETER 1: 17-23 ✱ LUKE 24: 13-35

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS RISEN INDEED!!

Read me the story again,” is frequently heard in many households as kids are growing up. Garrett had a favorite book about trucks, naturally it was called “All Aboard Trucks” and he wanted me to read to him every night before he would settle down and go to sleep. I’d get so frustrated; Garrett, I read this the past few nights; you know the story. I don’t care; I want to hear it again. So every night, those same trucks would be on the go, in the city, in the country, in the neighborhood doing the work they did the night before that and the night before that and so on. It was a cute book and I could understand why he wanted it read and it was always me he wanted to read it, not his mother. I guess she was blessed more than I was. Everywhere you turn, trucks are on the go!!

Maybe some of you did the same thing. Many parents read daily to children, often each night before they go to bed as was the case with Garrett. Kids, like many of us, and Garrett, have favorite stories, and so you might find yourself sitting on the couch or in a favorite chair, night after night, turning the pages of stories you can recite by heart because of its familiarity. Sure, sometimes kids will intentionally delay going to bed, one cannot deny the power of story to engage the heart and awaken the imagination.

Storytelling has long been at the center of the Judeo-Christian experience. In fact, that’s just what the two disciples were doing as they walked the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus following the death and resurrection of Jesus. As they walked, they talked about all the things that had recently happened, and

unbeknownst to them, Jesus was walking beside them. His question about their discussion launches into a story, a story ironically that they expected he'd already heard, and not realizing that the story they told was Jesus' own. At Jesus' insistence, they begin again, relating the hopes and heartaches that had been played out over the past few days.

Telling the story, of our lives and of our congregations, is important work as we journey through life. Our story and our perspective on it, is unique. The story of our congregation is the story of our faith. It is the story of how we have, over the years, striven to be good stewards of the resources of people, gifts, energies, time, and opportunity to tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

How effectively we tell our story influences how people will receive it. With words, pictures, video, in person, online, in printed materials, we tell the story of God's interaction with us and our call to be in service to the world. So as Jesus joins these disciples, it is no wonder this is where he begins, by asking them to tell their story. And he falls into step with them as they begin. Jesus listens as they tell their story and when they are finished, he says, "how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" It's like he's saying "Oh come on folks! Get with the program! Is this really all you believe? Jesus listens to their story and then he starts back near the beginning, with Moses and the prophets, and 'he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. Jesus hears their words and he puts them in a different context, sheds new light on them. They tell their story and he brings fresh perspective! He re-interprets for them the things they thought they already knew.

Athletes in training speak of feeling the burn. And you're thinking, why are we talking about feeling the burn after talking about stories and books? I hope I can explain. Folks who are not athletic and maybe had a past life of alcohol consumption might think of the warmth that spreads over your body after that shot of whiskey as feeling the burn or the sensation of a burn as it passes down your throat. True Disciples of Christ that get their faith exercised and are filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, instead of spirits also get to feel a different kind of burn and it is a more like a flame than a feeling or warmth. Our Gospel today tells us about two of the disciples who felt the burn after the resurrection of Christ.

Now on that same day two disciples 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?”

Many times the burn comes when you least expect it and not in the place you would imagine. All the action had been happening in Jerusalem and these folks were walking away from it. They actually felt like the action was all over and may have been traveling back to their home in defeat and despair. Emmaus was about seven miles from Jerusalem. We are not told so it may have been their hometown or only where they were going to spend the night before they continued their journey. They would truly experience the happenings in Jerusalem seven miles away from where they thought they had experienced them.

It is great that the name Emmaus means warm springs for the wellspring of their hearts were about to be warmed. They discussed the things that had happened, but we will see that they only thought that they knew what happened. Sometimes, we feel the burn when we think there is nothing to feel or nothing burning.

They were wrapped up in their conversation and reasoning and did not even notice Jesus drawing near to them. He did not sneak up on them. They were just too self-absorbed. How often has Jesus drawn near to you and me, but we were too self-absorbed in our ministry or troubles to even notice Him there? He said that He would always be with us, but so often we do not feel His presence because we have our life and problems all worked out or at least we are in the planning stages of working them out.

Jesus did not let them recognize Him at first. I believe He wanted them to open up their hearts to Him as a stranger first because they would have been too overjoyed to see Him and would have dropped all their questionings. He did not want them to just ignore their doubts and questions. He wanted them to have a chance to learn how to handle them. He listened to them.

So often we will open ourselves to a stranger more than we will do so with the Lord who loves us. It is like we think He does not know our doubts and fears and we do not want to risk His displeasure by voicing them to Him. Is that not silly? He who made the universe and us knows everything. We might as well voice our hearts to Him and let Him answer the questions and relieve the doubts. Hiding them only causes us pain.

Don't you love this? He asked them what was wrong though He knew exactly what they said and why they were sad. We often wonder why we bother to pray

because He already knows what we are going to say before we say it and what we need before we even know what we need. The answer is because He wants His children to interact with Him. He is a listening God.

Think about it, we often think a friend is the greatest person on earth and very wise when in reality the only thing they did was listen. They may not have said a word, but when we get done talking to them we feel great and thank them profusely for all they have done while they scratch their head wondering what was the great wisdom they bestowed. They listened! And if we can get so much from another frail human who is not omniscient or omnipotent just imagine what we would get if we let God who is both of those listen to us and then act in perfection to provide what we need!!!!

Cleopas means renowned father which makes me think he was a mature and godly man to whom people went to for wisdom. His reaction to Jesus' question in our terms may have been, "Man, where in the world have you been?" or "What planet are you from or what boat did you just get off of?" After all, all this had only taken place a few days ago and the guy had to be a foreigner who just got into the area to not know what had transpired. Crucifixions were common in those days, but a man like Jesus was not common and now with the talk of Jesus rising from the dead, there was no place in the area that was not abuzz with talk about these things.

This is so good! Jesus wants to hear their view of the happenings and their view of who He was or rather is. Cleopas starts out calling Jesus a mighty prophet and for sure He was. He says that His deeds and words were obviously of God and they were done in the open and not in some dark corner with only a few witnesses. He did them in front of God and everybody. In fact, at His baptism, He had the vocal approval of God the Father and the symbolic seal of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove that lit on Him. Man, we think the Good Housekeeping seal of approval is something! When the Father and the Spirit endorses and seals, it gets no better than that!!!! So far, Cleopas has a pretty good picture of Christ!

His account of what happened is accurate, but after that we see the doubt and confusion sinking in! Note they trusted in the past tense that Jesus should have redeemed Israel. Hey, we thought this guy was the redeemer, but all bets are off now and that is why we are sad. Jesus is dead and all hope is lost and Israel is not saved. The harvest is past. He's been gone three days by the way and we are figuring out how to get on with our lives after this great disappointment.

Not only that but we are at our wits ends because some of our ladies went early to the tomb and the body was gone. Stinking Romans or the Pharisees must have stolen the body. The poor gals were so distraught that they said they saw angels and even Jesus alive. Anyway, two others went and did find the tomb empty but they did not see Jesus, of course.

They heard the testimony of the empty tomb, but they knew there had to be a logical explanation for this. Yes, they may have seen Jesus raise others from the dead, but hey, no one can raise himself from the dead. Right? Wrong, wrong, wrong, praise Jesus, they were wrong!!!!!!

We do not know how close they were to Emmaus when Jesus joined them, but He got through the whole study from Genesis to Malachi by the time they arrived. WOW!!! We have been discussing these things for centuries and the Lord only knows how many hours of homilies and seminars we have spent on them not counting the megatons of paper and now megabytes of data we have composed. Maybe if we spent more time with the Master on the road, we could come to a final conclusion of the matter. God managed to tell His story from beginning to end in 66 books and had His Son on earth only three years to complete His mission. We have spent two thousand years like political reporters telling people, "What He really meant to say was...." Personally, I think He said what He meant and the simpler we keep our homilies and theologies the better off we will be when we stand before Him and get His review of our review of His Word.

All the time that Jesus was talking these lads still did not know it was Him. They must have been in awe of His knowledge of the Law and Prophets. They thought surely this is a great Rabbi or teacher and we cannot be so crass as to not offer him a room and meal after such fine teaching. Nowadays instead of the preacher getting invited for fried chicken on Sunday, the folks sit down to roast the preacher. These lads knew good teaching when they heard it and had a bit more respect of it than we do. The teaching ain't sweet if it steps on our feet.

If you were like me, and you read the same story over and over to your child or children, rarely do you find something new. The more familiar we are with the story the less able we are to step back from it, to hear it as if for the first time. The more conditioned we are to hear the same story told in the same voice, at the same pace, with the same language, the more harmless it becomes! The surer we are that we know the outcome, that we've memorized the script, the less engaging, the less transformative its power! After reading the same story night after night, you can, and many do, close your eyes and say the words while they flip the pages! But

what happens if you skip a word or drop a line? Yeah, they will notice; you don't dare change the words or the rhyme or the rhythm. Interestingly enough, Jesus meets the disciples on the road and tells them their own story in a new way. And sure enough, they heard something that they had not heard before.

Those disciples invited Jesus to stay with them to bless and break the bread. The connection was made. What was familiar, this table ritual, became new again. What was hidden, revealed. What was lacking, complete. The story became clear and the truth it held evident. In that moment, their eyes were opened and they see Jesus, and likely themselves, in a whole new light.

The two disciples couldn't wait to get back to Jerusalem. Even though it was late in the evening. They had to go back and tell the others what they had seen and heard. If Jesus is alive, there's no time to waste.

May this living Christ stay with us in this Easter season, that our eyes might be opened, that we might experience true communion, that our hearts might burn with story of our own vision for the story that gives us life.

Amen.