

**IS, NOT WAS**  
**1 Peter 1: 17-23 and Luke 24: 13-35**  
**April 26, 2020**  
**Eastminster Presbyterian Church**

Matthew Farris wrote: Today's Good News from Luke's Gospel challenges us to keep our faith even when we have lost our hope, because no matter what road we are on, Christ is walking beside us.

We have sung our hallelujahs! Shouted out, "He is risen!" We have seen inside the empty tomb and last week we caught a glimpse of Jesus through Mary's eyes, and eventually the eyes of the disciples. But today, we get to experience from another perspective what it is like to be back on the road wandering and wondering, "What is ahead now?"

We heard John's story last week about Jesus appearing in a safe place, a room locked up tight. It is good to know that Jesus comes to us in those places, and places in our hearts, where we feel most secure. And today, Luke takes us on the road--the road to Emmaus--or the road to Forney, Combine, Rockwall, Plano, Red Oak and other points on the map. These are the roads that we travel that do not always provide the safety and security and comfort of home. Traveling on them is sometimes risky. And yet, even in those physical places we travel, and in the movements of our hearts, Jesus meets us where we are, risky business or not. We are together, as the song lyrics say, pilgrims on a journey, brothers and sisters on a road.

Unfortunately, on this day, on this road to Emmaus, two of Jesus' disciples are not feeling the connection to their Lord. Their hearts are still broken. The women have shared the story about the empty tomb, and the disciples are confused, still. Like other stories of post-resurrection for Jesus, those seeing him alive now are frightened and unbelieving. So, these disciples do what many of us are doing these days for a bit of normalcy, a smidgen of sanity, and a shaking off of a bit of anxiety, they go outside. They walk and they talk. They are trying to clear their heads and make some sense of what is happening. Last week I just "breathed in deeply" when I saw Denise sitting outside recording her participation in worship. It was like a whole new world opened. It was good to travel from the inner sanctuaries of our homes to God's beautiful outdoors.

It is outside today that our story begins. Luke, ever the physician, tells us that Cleopas and the other disciple find themselves most likely trying to clear their heads and bring some healing to their hearts as they walk. Without any introduction, Jesus appears, strolling along with them. Then something strange happens. The original Greek tells us that the disciples “were **kept** from recognizing him.” Why in the world would God not want them to see their risen Lord? Well, God understands the human need for answers, and unfortunately quick answers, so just maybe God holds them back because God does not want them to “re-engage” with the old Jesus; this is the risen Lord and a whole new story is about to begin. The disciples are about to walk a brand-new road. Their mission will ask of them to look at the world through Jesus’ eyes, not theirs, and so, in God’s time, the risen Jesus, the same, and yet different, will be made known-will be seen-by them.

But for now, the story spills out rapidly to the stranger about the strange things that have taken place in the last few days about their Lord. And like last week, in John’s gospel, we get to the heart of what the disciples are feeling. From that deep spot of despair, we hear these words: But we had hoped. **Had** hoped. Past tense. They had hoped Jesus would save us. We had hoped that the early reports of the community spread of this virus were false. They had hoped life would return to the comfortable. We had hoped we could pick up life soon where we left off sometime early March. They soon learned God, in Jesus, was doing a new thing. As people of faith, we are living in God’s new thing, and we are hoping (-ing, a continuation) our eyes recognize Jesus in all the good. But, at this point in the story the disciples are like most of us right now, waiting. Stuck in place.

Summarizing Frederick Buechner, he describes Emmaus as the place where we go in order to escape, that “wherever it is” we know we can throw up our hands and say, let’s forget the whole thing, makes to difference anyway! Emmaus is where we go; where these two went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life.

Whether we are steady in faith, wavering and wondering or whether faith is lost or was never found, we are, all of us, pilgrims on a journey walking some version of our own Emmaus roads. Our doubts may not be in God, or the risen Lord, but let us face it, life is throwing all sorts of

disappointing roadblocks on our paths right now. The disciples had hoped that Jesus would be the one to make everything right in the world, then along came Good Friday.

But, out of Good Friday comes God's new thing. New life. Resurrection. And on that, we continue to build our lives. We are Easter people. We live in an Easter world. Yes, Christ has risen, but our hope rests in embracing the reality that Christ IS risen. Christ did not just appear and walk beside the disciples. Christ is still appearing. Still walking, still talking with us and for us, on every road we find ourselves. This pandemic is offering us the opportunity to look more closely, to seek out ways to "recognize" Jesus. And anything that asks of us to search out the Lord can only bring us the gift of a closer relationship.

The disciples obviously wanted a deep relationship with their Lord and friend. But despite all their gatherings, teachings, and preachings, they could not grasp the notion that the One who would redeem Israel and save the world from sin, could and would suffer. That was the old story.

The new story would mean they had to recognize the truth that God does not require suffering for salvation; but suffering is very much part of our human world. Jesus entered our human suffering to fully know us, so that we might know him down to the core of our being. The disciples, and we, must walk beyond our expectations of a saving Lord and embrace who Jesus is, not who we want Jesus to be. Jesus had told the disciples repeatedly when he was still among them that he would suffer, and they did not get it then. Here, on the road to recovery, they are still not getting it. They are leaning not on faith at this point, they are forging ahead on the "old road." What's done is done and there is no need to ask questions.

But, faith calls us to keep asking questions. Our relationship with Jesus is not an "I met you along the road, now I know you, one-and-done kind of proposition." Every single day of our lives we walk different roads, and every single day, the Lord walks those different roads with us. As it has been said, "Faith is not a destination; it is a journey." And that prompts us to understand the importance of asking ourselves this question often: Are my expectations of a risen Lord keeping me from recognizing him in a brother or sister who comes and walks alongside me on this road called life? Are we looking for an old "comfortable kind of faith" or is this walk

with Jesus asking of us to embrace faith by seeing through the eyes of Jesus? Seeing with him the comfort, the risk and in all the trust that joins the two together.

If our doubts, our despairs, our dashed hopes put up roadblocks to recognizing the Lord in the faces of those sent to walk life with us, to bear burdens with us, to be Christ's night-light for us, then perhaps we need to stop. We need to stand still in the middle of the road. We need to look beside and all around us and see that the Lord IS with us. We need to say out loud for our traveling companions on this journey, "we hope" and not "we had hoped."

Like the disciples along their way to Emmaus that day, we know the story. We may even know the story by heart. But, is the story written upon our hearts? Is the story of hope in Jesus part of our story? Do we try too hard at times to see Jesus where and how and when we believe we should, so much so that we fail to recognize him right where he is? The disciples walking, caught up in their own grief, knew the story of Jesus well enough that they could share with it with a stranger. And yet, they did not know Jesus well enough with their hearts to know the stranger was Jesus.

In her sermon titled, *Blessed Brokenness*, Barbara Brown Taylor says this:

"The blindness of the two disciples does not keep their Christ from coming to them. He does not limit his post-resurrection appearances to those with full confidence in him. He comes to the disappointed, the doubtful, the disconsolate. He comes to those who do not know their Bible, who do not recognize him even when they are walking right beside him. He comes to those who have given up and headed back home."

Bottom line: on every road of life, Jesus is walking alongside us. The uphill and downhill. The empty and overflowing. The ordinary and extraordinary. And in all places, Jesus recognizes us. Jesus asks, that by faith, we embrace where we are in every moment, whether that be in the extraordinary or in the simplicity of an ordinary meal of bread and wine because, no matter where we look, we will find Jesus.

As news and predictions, the new normal and prayers surround us all, it is good to remember that we are all on our Emmaus roads, similar and different, but all traveling with the same friend, our risen Lord. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all stopped long enough to invite him to join us for dinner and conversation? After all, Jesus IS risen, IS with us and IS our hope. Amen