

“On the Road of Shattered Dreams”

Steve Ramer

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Scripture

Luke 24:13 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

18 Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning 23 and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

25 And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. 28 So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, 29 but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, 34 who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Sermon

According to Luke it was seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. So, then, just how long does it take to travel seven miles on foot?

I guess it sort of depends on a number of factors doesn't it? A world class long distance runner could do it in under a half an hour (on a flat track of course!). While a reasonably healthy adult, with some healthy snacks and a water bottle would need between 3 to 4 hours to hike it. With young children in tow, I know for a fact that it can take most of a day

and several popsicles. But despondent and grieving the loss of a good friend I'm sure it felt like an eternity for those two from Emmaus with each step more painful than the one before.

The Bible is filled with stories of people on journeys! In fact, it seems as if every prominent person in the Bible must complete some kind of difficult journey. And of course a journey is certainly a common and apt metaphor for one's life and for each one's necessary progression in our spiritual growth. It makes sense then, that "a pilgrimage" or the actual practice of walking over sacred paths is a central part of Christians' and of nearly all other religious traditions as well.

And when I stop to reflect on those journeys found in the Bible I'm struck with how so few of them were easy! An elderly Abraham and his wife Sarah spend their lives traversing the fertile crescent from the Persian gulf to the Red Sea, searching for a promised land to call home. For 40 years Moses, Miriam and a bunch of other folks repeatedly crisscrossed the Sinai desert trying to find their way back to that fore mentioned promised land. And in this morning's story we encounter the aftermath of Jesus' life-long journey, from Galilee to Jerusalem. A journey that seems to have come to an end with the hopes and dreams of so many lying shattered on the ground.

But difficult journeys, winding roads and long-time passages, real and metaphorical, are a necessary, if not an unavoidable part of our universal human existence. And thus this trip to Emmaus is one of those difficult journeys that must be traveled. Jesus' followers now must return home filled with despair, confusion, anger and disbelief. They had gone to Jerusalem with great anticipation, filled with excitement, joy, and energized to finally see the fulfillment of God's long promised dream for her world.

But the murder of Jesus was not only the loss of a dear friend but it also had ground their dreams of the future into dust. The whirlwind of events of the previous week had reached a climatic ending that was the antithesis of all they had hoped for. Their long awaited liberator is now dead and buried and along with him so too their hopes and dreams were entombed.

Perhaps these two had been among the jubilant crowds that had thrown olive branches in the street to greet Jesus? Perhaps they too had sung hosannas at the tops of their voices as they danced their way to the Temple, believing fervently that their liberation was finally at hand! Tricky things, those hopes and dreams. Great companions when everything works out as planned. But it can be an even deeper bummer when things do not!

But as these two trudged along their way, a stranger, unnoticed, at some point had joined them. I often have wondered just how long had he been walking along with them before they even noticed? Not to mention how rude to not let folks know when you are sneaking up on them and eavesdropping on their private conversation!

But quickly it appears that this stranger was also painfully unaware of those current events all that had happened in the past week that those two must now, painfully recount for him. So painful were these events that they could not open themselves up to find any encouragement from those hopeful reports that his tomb had been found empty that morning. Hope for them had disappeared and become just too expensive to invest in anymore! At first the stranger chose to simply walk and listen.

But then after a while, he began to talk and he reminded them that many others before them had travelled similar paths. He reminded them of their history and the way that God had always been with those who genuinely seek to follow. And when the going got rough for Moses or the prophets, they also managed to persevere until their journey's end. They didn't stop, but they kept going, kept going because they knew that they were not alone.

As the three approached Emmaus the stranger was prevailed upon to stay and eat with them and then as the bread was broken those two desperate disciples at last recognized this stranger. What was it that had kept them from seeing him before? Was it grief? Had it been their doubts? Perhaps guilt for not being more engaged in the struggle? Or had Jesus perhaps failed to meet their mistaken assumptions?

Equally curious, what was it about eating together, the simple act of breaking of bread that suddenly opened their eyes? Did the deep listening of the stranger finally make them feel truly heard? Was it the carefully crafted instructions so they could understand? Maybe some simple nourishment? Perhaps they had not eaten all day? (I know it is hard to focus when my blood sugar is too low!) Perhaps finally stopping their routine, to serve and to eat with another broke through an unhealthy self-centeredness! A change of focus from themselves to the hands that now held the bread! In the breaking of the bread they suddenly realized! Yes, maybe it was those nail-scarred hands they understood! Of course it was him! But didn't we know it in our hearts all along?

But hasn't something similar happened to each of us at some point? Perhaps once our pain, or despair, or maybe even our shattered dreams are brought into some perspective, then the clouds that once covered us begin to lift and our understanding begins to clear. We begin to gaze back upon the journey thus far and we suddenly realize that he has been with us the entire time! Ahh, the miracle of just being heard, gaining new insight, rest and nourishment to help us gain a better focus.

Ahh and the miracle of nail-scarred hands! This of course is the good news of this story - Jesus hangs with us! He not only walks alongside us but stays with us until the journey's end - regardless whether we recognize him or not!

For you see, these two travelers had hit rock bottom, but the first thing Jesus did was to simply listen to their pain. At the start of their lonely walk those two had given up hope - they just couldn't let themselves believe in anything good anymore.

To hope again was too costly and just too painful! But in the end their burning hearts set them on fire! Their arduous journey home became a lively sprint back to the place, Jerusalem, where their dreams had been crushed. Returning, with heavy hearts and feet back to Emmaus had taken most of the day, but suddenly they had energy enough to race back to Jerusalem within a fraction of the time!

Drudgery had given way to excitement and despair to hope. They were definitely on fire now, filled with enough hope that they were ready to convince others into believing again! Hope once again had been born out of despair - just like it always is! And so my sisters and brothers, let us walk together, listen to one other, both in silence and in encouraging conversation and also be open to each other and especially to the strangers who amble up unnoticed at times beside us on the journey.

But when you turn off your screen this morning, I want you all to at least remember this - there were always three traveling on that road and so too it is with us, there is always three of us traveling together! There's you, there's me and there is another. And this other is not really a stranger at all, but when we are ready to see, we will recognize him as our Divine good friend!

Steve Ramer

Pastor Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship

300 E. Oak St.

Ft. Collins, CO 80524

(970) 412-7510