

NEW STORY ON EMMAUS ROAD
Easter Sunday – April 20, 2014 – Luke 24: 13-35
The Church of the Covenant

“Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” (Matthew 27: 22) –with this question Pontius Pilate inquired of the crowd. So I ask of you all today –What shall *YOU* do with this Jesus who is called Christ??? It is the question always to be asked when a Living Savior is present before you and you can behold Him with your own eyes...What to do with Jesus?

Two disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus. It is the Sunday after the crowd answered the question of what to do with Jesus by yelling, “Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!” The passion in the Garden of Gethsemane is over; the dead body of Jesus has been taken down from the cross; His lifeless form has been placed in the Garden Tomb, borrowed from another man, for Jesus needs no permanent tomb. The disciples are sad and despondent. Their hopes and dreams died along with their Master on Good Friday. They trudge along the pathway, lacking the passion and the purpose they once possessed. The dirge they sing is –“He is dead, He is dead, so they said, so they said”. So these disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus, “*talking*” as it says “*with each other about all these things that had happened.*” (Luke 24: 14) As they walk a stranger appears to them. He seems vaguely familiar and He joins them on their journey along the road. As it says, “*Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*” (v. 16) The stranger along the road asks them what they are talking about. And almost snapishly, snarkily they answer: “*Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?*” (v. 18) And the strange visitor, playing dumb asks: “*What things?*” And a story pours out of their mouths. They tell of Jesus, a “*prophet mighty in deed and word*” and how the chief priests and rulers delivered him up to death and crucified him. And now it’s the third day since all this happened. And there are some strange women disciples who went to the tomb early today and discovered that the tomb was empty, they could not find his body, and they came back with a strange and idle tale of angels telling them that “*he was alive.*” (v. 23) Then they say in such a completely discouraged and abject fashion to this stranger they have encountered along the road: You know, “*we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*” (Luke 24: 21) You have to hear it said with a sigh of discouragement –We had HOPED (note past tense) that he was the One... But he isn’t. He is dead. And our hope died with him. And we wasted our time and our energy following a dead dream that was unreal. How sad. We had hoped, but we had invested our hope in vain...

Now I break into the midst of these two disciples’ story to note something I had never seen before in this text. The story they recount is indeed the story of Holy Week and Easter. Jesus is seized by the authorities; Jesus is crucified, dead and buried; some disciples go to the tomb three days later only to discover that the tomb is empty. That’s the story of Holy Week and Easter in a nutshell. But then the disciples continue on the road with this stranger. At one point their eyes are opened and they recognize HIM. They recognize Jesus as the stranger. They see HIM standing right before them where before they had not seen Him. The resurrected Jesus comes to them; they experience Him; they realize that He is not dead but is risen from the dead just as He said. And now, see, this completely transforms their story, doesn’t it? Oh, Jesus had to die the death He died for the forgiveness of sin! Oh, Jesus had to die in order to be raised from the dead, just as He said. Oh, Jesus is now spiritually present with us; His spirit is eternally present with His disciples; I can see Him today; I can see Him now; the masked stranger sitting beside me is Jesus; the still small voice whispering to my heart is Jesus; the way being made clear is Jesus; the prayer answered is Jesus. He is risen! He is risen indeed! I can SEE HIM. I can FEEL His presence. He is with me. He will never leave me nor forsake me.

Do you see how the living presence of Jesus Christ transforms the story of the disciples? How it redeems the hopelessness? Oh, we had hoped He was the one to redeem Israel...becomes transformed by the presence and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ into WE KNOW HE IS THE ONE. WE KNOW HE IS SAVIOR AND LORD. WE KNOW HE IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD. WE KNOW HE HAS COME NOT JUST TO REDEEM ISRAEL. BUT THAT HE HAS COME TO REDEEM ME, PERSONALLY, UNCONDITIONALLY, IN LOVE AND IN GRACE, IN MERCY AND IN POWER! The old story becomes a new story along the road to Emmaus. Same words—different story.

See, in the resurrected presence of the Lord Jesus Christ there is transformation of all the old stories we carry around with us like a dead weight of the past. Just like His literal presence for the two disciples when they realized He has not died but is alive forevermore, just like the transformation of the story of their hopelessness, there is the transformation of our hopelessness, of the dead weight of the stories of our past. Consider...

Two disciples are traveling along the road of life speaking together today. The one is saying to the other, "I had a father who really didn't love me so that has made me incapable of loving anyone else ever in my own life." And Jesus appears to them, the resurrected Christ enters in, they see Him and they behold His face, and suddenly and miraculously the man realizes that God is the eternal parent who loves him with a love that goes to the cross and comes back from the dead, so powerful is His love. The Old Story becomes transformed by the presence of Jesus and the power of His resurrection. Same words...

Two disciples are traveling along the road of life speaking with one another today. The one says: "I am struggling with addiction and compulsion; I will never kick this habit; I will never be free; this runs in my family; I cannot escape it." And Jesus appears to them, the resurrected Christ comes in all His power and love, and they see Him and behold Him as He is, and suddenly, miraculously the man realizes that Jesus' spirit is the only thing he ever needs to hunger and thirst after again; Jesus provides for him a drink of Holy Spirit from which he will never thirst again. The Old Story becomes transformed by the presence of Jesus and the power of His resurrection into a powerful NEW STORY of redemption and love. Same words—different story.

Two disciples are traveling along the road of life speaking with one another today. The one says: "I have this debilitating condition; I will never get better; it is only downhill from now on; I have nothing to look forward to, only decline and death." And Jesus appears to them, the resurrected Christ comes in all His power and glory, and they see him, their eyes are opened, and they see the love writ wide there. The man realizes he is missing all the grace around him every day; he fails to see the love from his family; the people praying for him; the new mission God is encouraging to take on—to be a source of positive encouragement and motivation to others who struggle with the seemingly insolvable issues of life. Its not just decline and death—it is eternal life and glory which is the HOPE which a Living, resurrected Christ always sets before us. Same words—different story.

Two disciples are traveling along the road of life, speaking of the death of their loved one. The one says: "All I do any more is grieve; all I do is experience loss. I am so down. I feel so lost and alone. There is no hope, only pain." And Jesus appears to them, the One who was dead and is alive ever more, "*Because I live*", says Jesus, "*You and your loved one shall live also*". My love conquers death; my promises are sure and certain; my power knows no bounds, no limits. The story that you tell yourself is not over—You will see your loved one again in a glorious reunion beyond words. I am the resurrection and the life and in that day YOU SHALL LIVE! The old story of loss is transformed into a new story of eternal gain.

What is the old dead story you've been dragging along the Emmaus Road and for so long? What overwhelms you today? What is killing your hope and turning it to despair? What is the story you keep telling yourself so often that you have actually begun to believe it? Tell yourself a lie enough and you'll think it true. What is the old debilitating story, told and retold, embellished with each retelling, that keeps you from seeing the living, resurrected Christ right before your eyes, today, on this Easter Sunday? That keeps you from fully living today? He is risen from the dead and He is present with us. What will it take for you to open your eyes and see Him today?

Do not be CONFORMED to this world, as the Bible says, "*Be TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your mind.*" Transform the old stories of the past by the living Lord alive in the present. *In Christ you are a NEW CREATION. The old is gone. Behold, the new has come!* In the presence of Christ Jesus the old story is dead and a new and glorious story of a future filled with hope is given. Hope needed? He is the hope of the world. Healing needed? He healed along the dusty roads of Galilee and He heals still. World seem dark and despairing? Jesus is the light of the world. What is the old impossible story seeking to be redeemed and transformed by a risen Savior in your life today?

I loved it a couple of weeks ago when Miss Stacy Phillips was sharing her Children's Message. She noted that during Holy Week that Jesus was coming. And a little child spontaneously cried out –"WHAT?????" You've come to Easter Sunday. Jesus is raised from the dead. He has come to bring you life and life abundant today. He has come not just to bless you but to transform you. To turn every debilitating, negative, heavy, hopeless story of your life upside down and on its ear. To rewrite every story of your life and to turn it into one of grace and mercy, love and hope eternal. You mean Jesus is here? "WHAT?????" About time a few adults started saying in amazement, "What?????"

"Then what shall (you) do with this Jesus who is called the Christ?" What's the story you're telling yourself today that has as its punchline –Well, I had hoped that He was the one...that here really was the possibility of hope in my situation...that God really cared about me...that all of this Christianity stuff was real and true...

Open your eyes, beloved. Open your spiritual eyes. He is right here walking with you along the road to Emmaus. In plain view. The Savior of the world has beaten the cross and conquered death itself just to come here today...just for you...and just to look you in the eye ...and give you HOPE. I had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel...who knew He had come today on this Easter Sunday...to redeem ME????????? And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*