

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called 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, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹ He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about 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 leaders handed him over 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 these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed 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 they did not see him.” ²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So, he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Quite a few years ago, although this incident feels like it happened yesterday, we were at our cabin in the beautiful mountains of PA. with our children, grandchildren and grand dogs. We were having a lovely time. I decided one afternoon that I wanted to take a walk. I remember telling you before that I do not like going for walks at the cabin without Don; and I always had him lead the way. I was too afraid I would run into a snake.

I’m not sure why I didn’t take anybody with me. Maybe I wanted to prove to myself I could do this walking thing by myself at the cabin and survive. Or maybe everyone else was busy doing something else. I decided I would stay on the dirt road that goes by our cabin and part way up the mountain. I wasn’t quite alone because I took with me two companions, the black lab we owned at the time, Maddie and my grand-dog, Lucy. They both listened well so I didn’t need to leash them.

So, we’re taking a leisurely walk. I’m looking for deer, although having 2 dogs with me, that probably wasn’t going to happen. All of a sudden, I heard something. I thought it is was

something moving in the brush, maybe a deer. I took a few more steps and stopped again. When I finally looked down in front of me, I couldn't believe my eyes. There coiled in the middle of the dirt road, with its' head raised that its' tail beating out a warning was a rattlesnake. I kid you not, my very next step would have been on him, and he was ready to let me have it.

I backed up. My dog Maddie was on the other side of it and was very curious, so I started giving Maddie instructions to let it along and come around it to me. My son's dog, Lucy, took off and headed down the road back to the cabin at full speed. After I got Maddie to listen to me and safely away from the snake, we too made our way quickly back to the cabin.

That day on the dirt road past the cabin, I faced one of my biggest fears, a poisonous one at that. Did it change how I feel about snakes? Nope! I am still terrified of them. Did I learn anything? Yes, I will not go for walks up there without Don leading the way.

Today's bible lesson takes place on a road leading to Emmaus. Jesus had died. And just that morning some woman discovered the empty tomb. The disciples were in hiding, shocked, afraid, not sure what to do. Jesus had not revealed himself to the disciples yet,

Two of the disciples leave Jerusalem to make the seven-mile jaunt to Emmaus. Why are they leaving Jerusalem? Do they fear for their lives now that Jesus has been executed? We don't really know. All Luke tells us is that they are grieved about their recent experience. They are talking to one another, hoping to make sense of the nonsensical, when Jesus himself walks alongside them and joins them on their journey.

Luke tells us then that, “their eyes *were kept* from recognizing him”. Did you catch the passive voice? This grammatical construction obscures the reason that they can't recognize Jesus. Why didn't they recognize Jesus? Were they so grieved by their experience and so sure that Jesus was gone that they simply didn't expect him? Did Jesus look different after the resurrection? Was his face transformed? Was Jesus wearing a goofy disguise? We just don't know. Luke does not tell us.

Making it even more obvious to us that the two men had no clue they were talking to Jesus is their response to Jesus when he asks them what they are discussing, they are shocked and suspicious. Who doesn't know what has been happening in Jerusalem these days? You had to be living under a rock if you didn't know. Everyone knew. Everyone was talking about it!

Then their deepest feelings were revealed in verse 21: “, we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel, ” Had hoped. We invested our hopes in this Jesus, but he was not whom we had hoped he would be. Jesus' death dashed their hopes. Were they angry because they had given-up everything, given three years of their lives to follow a man who turned out not to be their saving Messiah? Were they afraid, afraid of what the future held for them now? Were their lives ruined? How would the community receive them? Would they be harassed? I would think they would have had a lot on their mind.

Fear of the unknown, or even, the “too-well” known can be debilitating. It can leave us feeling like we have few directions, if any, to turn. Sometimes the unexpected happens as the crucifixion of Jesus was for the disciples, leaving lots of questions about the future. The loss of a spouse or child, an accident, victimization, even the victimizations that occur to us as children, children being bullied, all of these unexpected situations and far more that I can mention can root a paralyzing fear in us.

We let fear gnaw at us as we struggle to make decisions. We don't want to make the wrong one because then we might blow something for our future or in relationships. Fear makes us question ourselves and what we are capable of doing.

COVID-19 has many of us sitting on edge. People have lost jobs and businesses are closing. The numbers of those who have the disease and who have died are reported to us daily, we know there is no cure, we need to practice social distancing, wear a mask in public places. People are living in isolation. Making it worse, is wondering what it will be like when this quarantine is finally over; and worried about whether this could happen again. This certainly has stirred up a lot of fear. I understand the fear, especially for those most susceptible to catching the virus.

There’s no denying fear is a part of our lives; and if ignored it can grow and worsen, running control over our lives. It can be crippling to anyone who holds on to it. We have every reason to fear, but the spirit of fear does not come from God. Let’s go back to the scripture for today and see how things play out for these two disciples.

Jesus responded to the disciples’ feelings of disappointment that the man they thought to be the Messiah, the surmised, was not since he died without accomplishing what they felt should happen. Jesus outlines for them the meaning and significance of his own death, starting from Moses and the prophets. It was “necessary” that Jesus would suffer, die, rise, and be lifted up into “glory.” Interestingly, even the knowledge of scriptures this man possessed, particularly, as he told his own story, did not open their eyes to see the man they were talking to was Jesus.

The encounter could have all ended there. We’re told Jesus walked ahead of them and was prepared to continue on his way, while the disciples had reached their destination. Fortunately, they were able to convince Jesus to stay with them. And then it happened. They sat to eat. Jesus took the bread and blessed it as he always had, and finally, they recognized him. Within an instant after that, Jesus was gone.

It gives me chills just thinking about that moment when they finally recognized Jesus. Well, I’ll just bet that changed their moods. Jesus took their dashed hopes and turned everything around.

In verse 33, we read “They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem”. It’s at that moment when they see Jesus that they realize they are able to face their fears and claim their future—God’s future. They still did not know exactly what their future was going to be, but now, they had hope and they were not afraid to face whatever would come their way. They had a purpose, it was to keep following Jesus, and knowing they would not be alone as they faced the fear of the unknown.

Our fears can keep us from finding Jesus when we need him most. We fail to see him in our lives trying to help when we become too fixated and unwilling to loosen the grasp we hold on our fears. We pray, and our prayers seem unanswered; keep praying. We believe we trust God, still we worry; use the energy of your worry to accomplish something. We say, we can’t help it, it’s how we feel; remember the words of a man found in Mark 9:24, who came to Jesus to have his son healed, he said to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!”, and Jesus healed the son. Think about the depth and power of those words. That little phrase has served me well as a prayer more than once when I found myself feeling helpless with my feelings of fear.

Are you facing any fear these days? You may want to take a trip on the road to Emmaus. Interestingly, no one has ever found the location of the village called Emmaus, even though it was only “seven miles” from Jerusalem. Perhaps Emmaus is the place you go when you need to find freedom from your fears and hope. Walking and talking with Jesus on our roads to Emmaus, just like the disciples did, may be just what we need to find the freedom we need to run back into life and whatever God has for us. Amen.