

## “Faith on the Road”

Acts 2:14a, 36-42 & Luke 24:13-35

May 4, 2014 ~ Rev. James Ramsey

We celebrate our faith on Sunday morning, we renew it, nurture it, proclaim it. But we can't leave it here. Our faith goes with us on the road, into the week. Faith works in our daily living, faith gets tested as we manage our relationships and responsibilities. I want to talk this morning about faith on the road.

Faith is never quite as clear during the week. We never feel quite as confident or religious or spiritual. That's why this morning's story “On the Road to Emmaus” seems so compelling. Lots of artists over the years have imagined the scene. In Robert Zund's version,



he shows three robed figures walking along a dirt road, shafts of sunlight breaking through the trees and clouds. The man in the middle, hand upraised as he talks, seems to fascinate the others. Ahead in the distance is a town, perhaps Emmaus.

Zund offers us a perspective of the travelers from behind. They are walking away from Jerusalem, the holy city. Because the two disciples have yet to “recognize” him in the breaking of bread, they do not realize the Lord is with them.

Here we have two people who seem to think everything is over. They have just experienced a devastating loss. “We had hoped,” they say, “he was the one to set Israel free.” Not only have they left the community, they don't place much credence in the testimony of the women...the women who heard angels declaring Jesus alive. Others had seen the empty tomb – but those ones never saw Jesus. Perhaps that is why these two are walking away.

These two disciples seem to be in a situation of unbelief, hitting the road, leaving their companions, deep in confusion. Two things happen.

One, they are joined by Jesus on the road. He actually walks with them in their loss of hope, in their bewilderment.

Two, Jesus (whom, again, they do not recognize) asks them to tell their story, and he stays to have dinner with them. Even when he chides them for their weak faith and goes through the scriptures, they are not in a full state of belief. They have yet to recognize him. Only with the breaking of the bread are their eyes opened; and at that moment of recognition, he vanishes from their sight.

It's a mystical story. And another painting, this one by the African-American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner, captures that sense of mystery on the road. His work presents the scene as ethereal. The scene is clear, yet blurry somehow, the details blending into the background. Tanner's work, like Zund's, helps us interpret the biblical story. What is recognizable and what isn't? What is ordinary and what is miraculous? What is present and what is past? Can a closure be an opening?



This meeting on the road – and perhaps some of your stories from the road, too, beg these spiritual questions.

Imagine this meeting on the road as a metaphor of how God deals with us when we have gone away or lost our bearings. Perhaps we can get a clue as to how we might deal with each other in our spiritual hesitation, our questioning uncertainty. With the breaking of bread, the two wayfarers are brought into communion, even though they have not fully acknowledged the mystery that beckons them.

This story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus presents us with a strange state of affairs indeed. Jesus was more with them on their journey...on the road, even with their doubt and unbelief, than when they actually saw him and realized who he was and came to total belief.

Jesus was more present when they didn't get it. Only in retrospect did they understand that their hearts were enkindled as they were walking and talking on the road - even though they did not know that it was he who was explaining the scriptures to them.

What a paradox! Of distance and closeness, of belief and unbelief. Is not this experience repeated over and over in our lives? Although you cannot see when or if it happens, it is startlingly clear when you witness it in others.



A man feels distant from God. He is unhappy about the sense of separation. He regrets his carelessness with the gifts that have been given him, the loves entrusted to him. He wishes he were more attentive, more "close" to God, more appreciative and prayerful. Finally, and strangely, there are times when he wonders whether he trusts in God at all. In those times he feels abandoned, at a loss.

A young, vibrant woman wonders if she has lost her faith. She doesn't feel that spark anymore, that confidence. She only wishes she could have back those moments when it all felt so wonderful. Now it just seems empty without God. When asked, "Well, do you believe in God, do you trust Jesus Christ as savior?" They would say, "Oh yes." OR, "Do you believe that Jesus died for you and is risen with a promise for you of eternal life?" They would again answer affirmatively, "Of course, but I don't feel it. I miss having a relationship with God."



The man is sad because he misses God, because he takes God for granted – his worst times are when he thinks God might not exist. He finds the thought of God's non-existence almost unbearable.

The young woman says that life feels empty without God. She only wishes she could feel God's presence more, that she could see and talk with God again. Her greatest worry is that she might have lost her faith in God.

They...We. We are disciples on the road. "We had hoped," the disciples said as they walked. Once there was hope, they thought. But even in their sense of loss, their longing for hope...there was hope. Even in their questioning of faith...there was faith...right there on the road.

Was not their life, their living, their whole being a prayer to God? Their faith went with them on their journey.





Even their desire to believe was believing. Even their longing to love was love.

And so, present with Christ at the table, they finally recognized the gift of the presence that was there with them all along, especially on the road, when they were walking away, when they were lamenting their loss, when they were questioning, wondering why, telling their woe, yearning for his presence, hearing his story once again.

Finally recognizing the risen Christ, they set their faces again toward Jerusalem, to tell their friends how their hearts were set on fire, not only in the breaking of bread, but on the road.