

Seeing Our Companion
Mark 24:13-35
Colebrook Congregational Church
April 30, 2017 / Third Sunday of Easter

I assume that everyone knows who Superman is, right? A comic book superhero with amazing powers that are showcased frequently in very public settings. He wears a very recognizable outfit, but no mask. And he has an alter ego that he assumes to blend in with everyone else. That's Clark Kent. It's not a very good disguise, though, is it? All it is, is glasses and I think his hair parts on the other side, and yet nobody recognizes him, do they?

Today's selection of the Appearance on the Road to Emmaus reminds me of Superman's terrible disguise in Clark Kent, because those two disciples could not recognize Jesus walking with them. Now in this selection, there is a lot going on that can relate to many different aspects of Christianity, so it is best to just pick one aspect and go with it at each reading. And so, what stuck out to me this time, was how the followers of Jesus, walking on their road, examining how their lives are going, could not recognize Jesus in their midst, they could not see that He was their companion on that road.

The story is the middle section of chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel, which is his last chapter, and is supposed to have taken place in just one day. That day was Easter, and Luke has stretched that single day into a series of experiences. The chapter starts with the account of the women finding the empty tomb and the appearance of the angels, followed by the Appearance on the Road to Emmaus, which is then followed by an appearance of Jesus to the Disciples, the Commissioning, and then Jesus Ascends to Heaven. Luke will then continue with the story of the early church in the Book of Acts.

Back to today's reading, we start on the road to Emmaus with two followers of Jesus, Cleopas and an unnamed one. Usually in the gospels, when a Disciple goes unnamed, it is an invitation to put ourselves and see ourselves in the place of that person. So they are on this road to Emmaus. Here's the thing, we don't know where Emmaus is. It made me wonder, how do we lose a whole town? It apparently happens. Also muddying the water is that while our Bible says that it is sixty stadia from Jerusalem, and the translator switched it to miles for us, footnote "u" on page 78 tells us that some sources say it was 160 stadia. It turns out that there are ruins of a town at both of those distances on the same road from Jerusalem. That doesn't change anything about the message, it's just a frustrating coincidence.

Anyway, the two Followers are going along and discussing what has happened over the past few days. Imagine yourselves in their position. Far from home, following a man you know who has done mighty deeds and in whom you had placed your trust for redemption, but He was then condemned, tortured, and crucified before your eyes. You've heard a rumor that He was still alive. But you are not sure what has happened, so you are walking on this road, examining your life situation and processing your loss.

Then this guy comes up and interrupts you, who for some reason doesn't seem know what had just happened. You unload all the things that you are going through to this person, that you don't realize is actually Jesus.

They are bewildered by this. He then starts to teach and interpret the scriptures to them, just as Jesus had done before, but they still did not recognize their companion on the road.

When they got to Emmaus, their companion makes like He is going to keep traveling down the road, but they insist that He accept their hospitality.

At the meal, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the two Followers. It was at this moment that the Followers realized who their companion had been on the road where they had been discussing their sadness and loss.

This story shows us how the Risen Christ is still present with us today. Present with us as we travel down our own roads and when we share our bread with strangers and when we gather together in fellowship.

There is a famous poem that has a similar message called *Footprints in the Sand*.

ONE NIGHT A MAN HAD A DREAM. HE DREAMED HE WAS WALKING ALONG THE BEACH WITH THE LORD. ACROSS THE SKY FLASHED SCENES FROM HIS LIFE. FOR EACH SCENE HE NOTICED TWO SETS OF FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND. ONE BELONGING TO HIM AND THE OTHER TO THE LORD.

WHEN THE LAST SCENE OF HIS LIFE FLASHED BEFORE HIM, HE LOOKED BACK AT THE FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND. HE NOTICED THAT MANY TIMES ALONG THE PATH OF HIS LIFE THERE WAS ONLY ONE SET OF FOOTPRINTS. HE ALSO NOTICED THAT IT HAPPENED AT THE VERY LOWEST AND SADDEST TIMES OF HIS LIFE.

THIS REALLY BOTHERED HIM AND HE QUESTIONED THE LORD ABOUT IT. LORD YOU SAID THAT ONCE I DECIDED TO FOLLOW YOU, YOU'D WALK WITH ME ALL THE WAY. BUT I HAVE NOTICED THAT DURING THE MOST TROUBLESOME TIMES IN MY LIFE THERE IS ONLY ONE SET OF FOOTPRINTS. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY WHEN I NEEDED YOU MOST YOU WOULD LEAVE ME.

THE LORD REPLIED, MY PRECIOUS, PRECIOUS CHILD, I LOVE YOU AND I WOULD NEVER LEAVE YOU! DURING YOUR TIMES OF TRIAL AND SUFFERING WHEN YOU SEE ONLY ONE SET OF FOOTPRINTS, IT WAS THEN THAT I CARRIED YOU.

On the Road to Emmaus, those Followers were processing what had happened to them. Their feelings of sadness and loss with what happened in Jerusalem. Just like the man in the poem looking back at the footprints, feeling abandoned during the troubling times. But there Jesus appeared to them and walked with them, like in the poem as well, and brought them comfort, like how the man was carried by the Lord.

Jesus meets us on the road of our own lives, in the everyday places and experiences of our lives, and in the places we retreat to when life feels too much for us to handle on our own. This story both warns and assures us that wherever we go, Jesus will be with us on our journey, though we many not recognize Him.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

Living Jesus, whose presence on our daily road we often fail to see; warm our hearts with fresh confidence in your Word, so that, in making room for the stranger beside us, we find Your hospitality awaiting us, and the reassurance of Your presence to inspire us to continue traveling the road and to share the good news of Your resurrection. Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

[PAUSE]

O God who welcomes all in love, to You we pray for the good of Your church, our community, and the concerns of those in need. We lift up our hearts in faith to You, the one who hears all prayers and holds close all of Creation.

Thank you for all the blessings and gifts you have given us, for those you have led into our lives and for moving us into the lives of others. And we thank you for using us as instruments of your divine love for us all.

You know our faults and yet You promise to forgive. Help us to face up to ourselves, so that, as You move toward us in mercy, we may repent, turn to You, and receive mercy.

We offer our prayers for our neighbors and loved ones. We pray for those whose lives are broken by distress, fear, anger, pain, or illness. We pray for the victims of war and violence, that peace comes soon. We ask that You gently touch their lives by Your Spirit, bringing Your warmth and comfort, to bring hope & restoration to fractured lives and souls.

We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, to better understand the witness of Your Followers. We ask that You come to us when we are afraid and that you give us the strength & perseverance to live through any disappointments and the courage to overcome obstacles. Fill us with Your Spirit and make us living carriers of of Your Love to all who need it. Ignite our Hearts to act as You want us to do, and help us to recognize the stranger in our midst.

We especially pray for:
The Suddath Family

Gracious God, we offer these prayers and all those of our hearts up to you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

116:1 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

116:2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

116:3 The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.

116:4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, save my life!"

116:12 What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

116:13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,

116:14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.

116:16 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds.

116:17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

116:18 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,

116:19 in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?" 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 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?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.