

#### **4-30-17 "Glimpses of Truth" A Reflection on Luke 24:13-35 by Mark Arbisi, Christ Church, KBK**

You can say that "I've been there and done that" to the extent that it is possible to say that. That is I've been to Emmaus in a geographical sense, which is countless miles removed from being there in a spiritual sense. Which is to confess Jesus did not join me in conversation that day. Jesus did not break bread with me or I with him that day; Jesus didn't open my eyes that day either. Actually, my eyes were pretty much shut as I had just flown over the Atlantic, then the Mediterranean, having been up all night, as I've never been one who could sleep on an airplane, and was, needless to say, exhausted.

Now when I say "been there to the extent possible" I mean, there is great speculation as to precisely where Emmaus was located, indeed even if it was ever located anywhere in a brick and mortar sense. However, my Palestinian taxi driver would have none of that. As we headed out just a few miles from the airport in Tel Ave he enthusiastically pointed to the precise location as if the entire universe agreed on the precise location. Palestinians you see take great pride in such things in the same way you or I might do when speaking of Maine or New England historical events. It's our home, in much the same way he understood Emmaus as his—and yes BTW, our Palestinian taxi driver was one among the rapidly dwindling minority in the Holy Land known as Christians. You heard me, the Church is in rapid decline at the very locations that Jesus once walked. Compared to the Jewish and Muslim populations there are only a handful of Christians remaining, located primarily in and around Bethlehem.

And yes, regarding said speculation, there are many biblical scholars and archaeologists who would maintain that Emmaus never was, nor was ever meant to be understood as a geographical location. Emmaus, they would say, is strictly about the road we travel. The journey we take. That which everyone takes at some point. Emmaus is, for such scholars, recognized as the place any one of us inevitably find ourselves when life takes a wicked turn, when the weight of the world is crushing, when it seems despair alone becomes our only companion, when anxiety appears set to define all our tomorrows. Geographically and spiritually, Emmaus is best understood as that kinda place: lonely, desolate, between what was envisioned and what is, between the loftiest hopes and a case of full blown resignation. And so it seems, perhaps I should count my lucky stars that I was half asleep at the time.

But of course, what makes Emmaus Emmaus is not merely all that but the other side of all that as well. The other side is nothing less than the Easter Event—you know, the walk with me and the talk with me experience—yes, that. Like so many, even all these many years later, Easter hadn't yet

registered on the hearts and imaginations of those two Emmaus Road travelers. As we heard, they were in for far more than a bit of a surprise; and the same special treat awaits each and every one of us who find ourselves stuck on a road that seems more than we can bear.

It's an Easter thing, a Risen One thing, to be drowning in sorrow one second and accompanied by Jesus the next second. This is why we shout and scream "Alleluia" and why when the worship leader shouts "He is Risen" the assembled congregation shouts back "He is Risen indeed!" It's because Easter means "He lives!" Which means of course he comes and goes. It means of course he is a tough guy to pin down. It's difficult to arrange a meeting with the Risen One because he is always and a day "ahead of us," rushing here and there, to and fro, because someone somewhere is in such desperate need for an up close and personal Resurrection moment and so he may not always be in our back pocket as we might wish. This is a God thing! This is a good thing! This is how Easter has always been—as we hear in our lesson this morning, the moment they recognize him he vanishes. "Lights On, Lights Off." The Risen One cannot ever be pinned down. Because he lives, because he is active in and all about us, because sometimes we recognize his presence and sometimes he seems far off, all of this is why we get so darn excited about Easter. It is why Easter is the first day of the week. Because there is nothing like starting off the week right...

This is why Luke refers to this journey as a "seven mile trip," which is biblical short hand. "Seven" does not mean anything quantifiable, rather it means the "time of completion." Seven means whatever time and distance that may be required for you, for me "to get there from here." In the same way Emmaus is here, there and everywhere, the time it takes to get there, to go between there and away from there is the time it takes. Not a second shorter or longer. And once completed you are darn well aware it is completed. How? Because eyes once shut with sorrow, or grief, or fear—or any of a million things that spur our journey down that dark road--are suddenly opened! It's like a blind person seeing for the very first time. Yes, this is our lesson, this is Easter: Eyes open to the Risen One make all the difference in life, a true world of difference. Because just like Emmaus, Easter too is not a well-defined place—certainly not GPS'able, and not really a day on a calendar—Easter is the moment "eyes are opened." One of course doesn't plan for an eye-opening moment with Jesus in the same way one might schedule a get together with one's dentist. Easter has its own unique way of sneaking up behind us and surprising us; and for no two of us is Easter identical. Luke as much as says so.

Because the first identification of Jesus in this story is as a stranger. And how very contemporary that is. How strange indeed our dear Jesus appears to the world around us, to our secular friends and family, to the "Nones" who have no place for religion—how they misunderstand and shun, even fear our

dear strange Jesus. Yes, that is part and parcel of many a journey to Emmaus. But our man from the empty tomb doesn't give up on such multitudes, he walks and talks, and carries on and unravels the mysteries of scripture and reminds everyone how such and such an experience—what we thought was an empty tomb, what we thought was death, what we thought we knew more about than God Almighty, was in truth and fact just our dear strange Jesus doing his Risen Lord thing. That's how he works. That's Easter!

Though our eyes weren't open at the time he was doing it all, which explains how we ended up on that dusty, twilight path to nowhere. And even when he is doing all these many things right in our face, and even when because of the magnitude of everything he does “our hearts—our burning within,” and even though all this magnificence is producing an internal flame and yet our eyes remain shut, having still not glimpsed Easter, still Jesus carries on offering tokens, offering grace, offering understanding and forgiveness, offering himself, offering bread that is broken and wine that is poured utterly and completely out. And yes, with any luck—like for the two in our story—it's about then that our eyes and the rest of us get a clue. It's about then that Easter first dawns. It's about then that all the above is “made known” to us.

Now I hope it goes without saying that having a “one's-eyes-opened-experience” is what life is all about, is the most wonderful of wonderful life-altering, life-affirming, life-enriching sensations possible for a human being. It could be described as a conversion, as being born-again, as starting over or starting at the beginning, which again appears to be a lesson Luke is intent upon us receiving.

Because “Their eyes were opened” recalls the first meal in the book of Genesis, where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and...say it with me...“their eyes were opened” and they knew they were naked. Now just guessing here but I would imagine that after walking seven miles with the Risen One, after talking with the Risen One, after sharing a journey and an extended Bible lesson with the Risen One, after not knowing you were spending such quality time with the Risen One when in fact it turns out that you were benefiting immensely from the Risen One, would yes, feel a great deal like standing naked not just before God but before the world. Just saying. But let's also cherish this moment...standing fully known, and once the light bulb goes on, *fully knowing* before God can be about the most blessed, enriching, warm and fuzzy, over the top joyous and intimate sensation anyone can have in this life. And friends, this most sensational experience anyone can have in this life is synonymous with that thing called Easter.

So friends, no matter who you are and where you are on life's journey... please be clued into the very real possibility that the Risen One is the

stranger by your side. Luke highlights this because frankly we don't have to travel too many miles before we're caught up in the traffic of this world, all the hard realities of life; friends who suffer; people overcome by worries and frustrations, people lost in anger, people bitter about what is and what should be. And yes, with them it is easily possible even for us to lose sight of Easter.

Perhaps a final lesson is this: When we are truly sensitive to all the strangers by our side and all the strangers far, far away, one stands an excellent chance of walking with the very best of company. And towards that end and as we journey forward we keep a prayer in our hearts and on our lips, which now we shall sing together: "Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth Thou hast for me..."

Let us sing; thanks be to God and Amen.