



Sermon: Where is the Good News?: Emmaus

Sermon Series: "Where is the Good News? : Finding the Good news in less than ideal Circumstances."

Sermon Title: "Where is the Good News?: Emmaus"

First Lesson: Ps 116: 1-4; 12-19

Gospel Lesson: Luke 24: 13-35

Where is the Good News?" Emmaus!

We are continuing with our " Where is the Good News?" Series and this week I am inviting us to explore where the good news is in this journey that many of us are familiar with scripturally; Emmaus.

And I need to first share with you all that each week, I am getting more and more excited about the commitment I have made to stick with our lectionary readings for the year.

Because what I am discovering (and my prayer is that perhaps you are as well), is this beautiful mystery known as the Bible, beginning to unfold in a way that I believe is meaningful; at the same time drawing us hopefully closer to the Divine.

And what I am more excited about is the way that these Holy texts are building upon one another each week, to provide for us a more comprehensive and holistic story;

And so the revelation that I am seeing within our First Lesson and Gospel this morning, in addition to the beautiful song that Mandy and John sang to help us to engage our texts this morning in a fresh and creative way is this;

Do you remember how from Holy Week through Easter, I have been inviting us to respond to the empty tomb through the eyes of Judas, Mary Magdalene and Thomas?

Well how the Holy Spirit revealed this weeks' text to me is that **now you and I are invited to listen why?.....because now Jesus is responding to us;**

That's right folks, what we are beginning to witness right before

our very eyes through our first lesson and gospel this morning is Jesus direct response to us;

In fact the prayer is that by the end of this sermon, you and I will be able to recognize and hear the voice of Jesus so clearly in these texts; speaking directly to our own unique situations and hearts; that **it will be just as palpable; it will be just as** apparent as the story in Genesis, where the Word revealed how Adam and Eve essentially had frequent communication with God on a regular basis;

For in the story of Adam and Eve church, humanity had an unmistakable connection with God;

So much so, that before the whole forbidden fruit situation; it seemed that humanity was quite comfortable with talking with God and knowing God's voice.

And then theologically after the fruit was eaten; this same familiarity and connection seemed to have been lost on humanity.....so much so that I believe this is why the Triune God manifested God self which produced Jesus on Earth both human and Divine; to help humanity to re-establish our connection with God.

And so what I see happening in our scriptural texts today theologically, is that you and I are embarking on the third part of the Triune God emerging right before our very eyes; the Holy Spirit;

But this idea of course is not fully realized.....

In fact the Holy Spirit will not make itself fully known and apparent until we get to Pentecost Sunday in the Upper Room.... But fleshing this concept out a little further; looking at the Old Testament texts, the Holy Spirit was still there; **the Holy Spirit has always been here, from the beginning hovering** over the void and murky world;

But back then in the OT days, the Holy Spirit was perceived as being unpredictable.

It seemed that only some people were chosen to receive it at times mainly the prophets....

So now I believe that Jesus essentially is preparing the world for **a new revelation;**

A revelation that although the theme of Resurrection is still a concept very difficult for the people to grasp back then as it is for many of us today;

I believe that a part of this Resurrection is sharing with the world that God does not die, **but God's spirit lives on....**

Just like with you and I; **our earthly bodies do die; but our spirit lives on as well!**

This idea sort of reminds me of the last three days I got to spend with my dad who most of you know has passed on; almost 6 years ago to pancreatic cancer;

I baptized my father on Friday at his request;

My father transitioned on early (two days later) Sunday

morning....

And folks up until then, even as a pastor, I never witnessed anyone take their last breath and haven't since my dad....

Either I prayed for the individual as they were transitioning on, only to be informed that she/he transitioned on later; or I had arrived onto the scene after the individual had already passed;

So to witness my dad's last breath was surreal;

But interestingly enough, I believe that I witnessed the essence of what I lifted up earlier; that **my dad's earthy body did indeed die;**

His human functions to keep his body alive **did stop;**

But folks, the last breath he took I truly now (thinking back), do not think that it is an accurate terminology to explain what I experienced in terms of it being **his last breath;**

For **I do not believe that this was my dad's last breath....**

It was just a continued breath in a place where the word says in John 14:2; *"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.*

So theologically I believe that my father's breath continued on in the heavenly realm....

To say it in another way; in that room right before the transitioning of my dad, it was not like someone poking a tiny hole into a balloon and watching the air deflate out of it that I experienced....

On the contrary, my dad's "last breath" literally created an automatic response within me **to reach up and try to grab what seemed like his spirit that just transitioned on....**

So again it was surreal because it was evident that his body **did indeed perish;**

But what I was instinctively trying to grab onto like a helium balloon floating into the sky, was what **I believe was my dad's imperishable spirit that just transcended on;**

So for me **this experience** was what gave me the strength to go to church that same day of his physical death at Saint Mark in Wichita to lead Holy communion;

This experience has been what has led me not to mourn my dad with a sense of doom; but I am comforted in knowing that **just as his imperishable spirit lives on with God; I am comforted to know that mine will as well.....as with all of God's children.**

And so getting back to what is happening I believe in our scriptural texts this morning; is that Jesus is setting up a revelation for his disciples then and for us today; to not be afraid or discouraged by the empty tomb but instead rejoice; for the Resurrection concept that has been so murky, is slowly about to become realized for all who have ears to hear and eyes to see; that Jesus is truly not dead...but His Spirit lives on!

And so now I think it appropriate to bring in our gospel this

morning and why I positioned the beautiful song of John and Mandy, is because the song is essentially another interpretation of what this Emmaus experience and I think the beautiful lyrics might help to shine some light onto our gospel...

Because essentially as I set the theological tone for us today; the walk on Emmaus for me theologically reflected the tone of a funeral procession;

For it was a very somber moment for these disciples;

For although there was no body that the disciples were physically carrying of Jesus;

The disciples from my perspective were definitely in a state of mourning;

For **even though** there was talk of Jesus being seen by Mary Magdalene and the other disciples;

And **even though** Thomas touched the wounds of Jesus for himself;

There was mourning...

And the primary reason for their mourning I suspect, was because the situation and circumstances that these people were dealing with from their oppressive government had not really changed;

For **there was and still is** corruptness in the world;

There was and still is evil in the world;

In fact from their point of view, I would imagine that having sightings of Jesus here and there only frustrated matters more, because they felt that their leader had abandoned them in many ways.

I am certain that they were even confused as to why Jesus wouldn't just stay with them altogether.

No to mention, on the surface Jesus death and resurrection sightings really hadn't changed their circumstances all that much!

So from these disciples perspective, I envision that **they were still waiting** on a Savior;

Looking back at Palm Sunday for a bit, **the disciples were still waiting** for this amazing new king who would turn their government onto its head...

And why I am comfortable with my theological engagement of this text church is because in verse 21 of our gospel the disciples said, ***But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.***

And now it is safe to say that the disciples in many ways gave up on this hope.

Looking at Lesson One before going into how the song lyrics shape this story; I believe the reason why Psalm 116 is paired with our gospel, is because I believe it serves as the goal for you and I to get to spiritually...

For Psalm 116 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving

In fact in my bible, it labels this psalm as a Psalm of Thanksgiving for Recovery from Illness...

But I want us to take note that the illness is not named, nor does the Psalmist mention how God helps him to recover...

Yet the psalmist is giving thanks...

The psalmist is revealing some sort of connection that he has established with God that has made him feel delivered and recovered....

So the question becomes what does this psalmist feel that the disciples do not?

And furthermore, how can you and I get to this place of assurance like our psalmist?

And this is when we will finally turn to the lyrics that was sung for a possible revelation to give us something to think about in our own Emmaus journey....

And so the lyrics are:

Abide With Me, Tis Eventide

[The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square](#)

Abide with me; 'tis eventide.

The day is past and gone;

The shadows of the evening fall;

The night is coming on.

Within my heart a welcome guest,

Within my home abide.

O Savior, stay this night with me;

Behold, 'tis eventide.

O Savior, stay this night with me;

Behold, 'tis eventide.

Abide with me; 'tis eventide.

Thy walk today with me

Has made my heart within me burn,

As I communed with thee.

Thy earnest words have filled my soul

And kept me near thy side.

Abide with me; 'tis eventide,

And lone will be the night

If I cannot commune with thee

Nor find in thee my light.

The darkness of the world, I fear,

Would in my home abide.

And so John shared with me some meaningful background on this song and shared with me "Abide with Me, Tis Eventide" is Hymn 165 in the Latter-day Saint Hymnal, which cites the hymn's connection to Luke 24:29 specifically and Luke 24:13-32 more broadly. Harrison Millard, composer of the original hymn, sang alto at age 10 with the Handel and Haydn Society (famous classical choral group in Boston with chapters outside Boston). The Words and music were written in the years after the Civil War. Various choral arrangements have been performed by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

In the first verse, the piano plays slow, elongated, quiet, calm

chords that match the contemplative feeling evoked by the text: "the shadows of the fall, the night is coming on."

In the second verse, the piano plays consistent eighth notes, portraying the walk with the Savior on the road to Emmaus. The eighth-note movement also evokes the emotional stirring found in the text: "has made my heart within me burn as I communed with thee." In the final verse, dissonant harmonies in the piano portray the poet's recognition of fear, loss, alone-ness, grief, remorse: "Lone will be the night if I cannot commune with thee nor find in thee my light."

The dissonance intensifies and heavier chords evoke the poet's vulnerable state of mind: "The darkness of the world, I fear, would in my home abide." However, relief and comfort are found in the poet's pleading for the Savior to "stay this night with me."

So again thanks so much John and Mandy for collaborating with me on this sermon.

And so looking at our gospel, I will celebrate the disciples on this walk for a moment as I have celebrated Mary Magdalene and Thomas because in all cases, they all were able to recognize Jesus even though they were all under a great deal of turmoil. Because I will reiterate as I have done before, seeing is a good thing...

For it is typical for a lot of us not to always be able to see when we are in the midst of our circumstances...

For it can be difficult to see sometimes beyond our fears;
It I can be difficult to see sometimes beyond the tragedy that lies before us;

So I celebrate these disciples because even on their walk filled with a very intense and focused conversation; the disciples were able to recognize that a third person joined them....

And not only did the third person join them, but the stranger seemed to bring them some sort of comfort....

And the song that was sung echoes this deep longing for this connection not to end;

Because **for the first time**; as I step into their shoes, the disciples were able to get some clarity;

For the first time, someone was able to connect the theological dots for them that they were mulling over;

So not only was this guest invited to stay over because it was getting late and that would have been the hospitable thing for them to do; offer him a place to dine and recline;

But this guest gave them a comfort and a true connection that they weren't ready to let go of;

I would imagine that it was connection that they never wanted to let go of....

So for me the essence of this song is revealing all of this that I have mentioned and more;

A longing to hold onto this guest who brought them so much comfort;

A longing to have this guest abide with them because his presence brought a sense of assurance;

And **where the good news lies** as I see it is that the guest accepts the invite.

The better news is that the guest makes himself known in verse 30; *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.*

The greatest news is in verse 31 that the disciples *eyes were opened, and they recognized him;*

And then the tension of the text occurs after they recognized him and the rest of verse 31 says that Jesus then **vanished from their sight.**

Verse 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?"*

And for me why I call verses 31-32 the tension of the text, because it highlights what I have been saying for weeks; this idea that perhaps some of us might be missing the transfiguration moments in our lives; this idea that some of us might be missing key resurrection moments in our lives.... In this case the disciples didn't miss it....well they almost did....they came close to it....but they were able to see Jesus just in the nick of time before he vanished.....

But what would the world look like if you and I got more efficient at seeing these grace filled moments sooner than later? How would our circumstances play out if you and I were intentionally seeking out these transformative moments from the start?

Because you see looking at the song one last time, it is a beautiful song where the artist is pouring his heart out asking the guest to abide with him;

The reality is that this although a very honorable and understandable request...I stopped by to say that it is an unnecessary request;

For the presence of God is already here;

The ongoing theme in all of these texts with Mary Magdalene and the disciples at the empty tomb;

Thomas requesting to see and touch the wounds of Jesus;

The disciples in our Emmaus journey wanting Jesus to stay a little longer;

The ongoing theme and Jesus response to us in this text is that he is always here.

But the invitation I believe is for you and I to grow from **being in a place of spiritual hindsight so that we might move into a place of spiritual foresight...**

You see looking at Psalm 116 one last time, my aha moment is that **you and I are looking at an individual with spiritual foresight;**

The foresight to know that although his circumstances around

him are not ideal;

The foresight to know that even although there are people out there to get him;

The foresight to know that even if his own physical body rejects him;

That God is still here and will never leave him;

So church the goal is for you and I to keep praying and to keep learning;

The goal is for you and I to keep growing and keep evolving in our faith;

To move from place of spiritual hindsight;

To move from a place of saying, “was that God just now talking to me,”

To get to a place of spiritual foresight to know God’s voice that is offering to guide us every step of the way;

To have the spiritual foresight that The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

God makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

God restores my soul.
God leads me in right paths
for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Let the Church say Amen!

Sincerely,

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