



Sermon by Pastor Tim O'Brien

April 30, 2017

New Testament Lesson

Acts 9: 10-19

Gospel Lesson

Luke 24: 13-16

Emmaus

- 1) rabbit/duck
- 2) one face /two faces
- 3) straight lines / crooked lines

Looking at the same thing sometimes we see different things. Our eyes can be closed to what is literally right in front of us!

This of course is the situation in our Gospel lesson of the two men on the road to Emmaus. Their blindness seems unbelievable to us, from this side of the cross, but let's remember what was happening. Jesus had appeared about 3 years earlier and begun to rock every religious, social and political boat he could find. He taught of a new kingdom, of a new social order, of radical forgiveness. Hopes escalated that indeed this man would redeem and restore. Certainly no one thought it would end with him on a cross. So, when we join our story, Jesus' followers have been reeling in pain and shock for 3 days.

Their hopes are shattered. His body has disappeared. They are confused. What went wrong? We thought he would conquer,..... we thought he was different,..... we thought..... But he is dead. It's over.

Here is where we join two companions leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus, about a 7 mile walk. They are joined by a stranger who asks why they are so glum. Now Luke tells us clearly that it was Jesus who joined them, but of course they don't know that! It was simply a stranger to them. Their eyes were closed and they could not see what they did not expect to see.

I wonder how often we have looked Jesus in the face and not recognized him....

I wonder how often we have looked a stranger in the face, and not seen Jesus smiling at us, because we didn't expect to.

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The stranger - Jesus - helps the men see with new eyes – Just like Ananias did with Saul giving him a new mission and purpose to build up and expand the church as well as his new name, Paul. So, to are we to see new beginnings where others see dead ends - see life in the midst of death - hope in the midst of despair - In other words we are to see that the resurrection is still going on rippling outward from an empty tomb – touching lives and hearts.

Linda was a woman who definitely needed a change in her life. She was homeless and an addict. She was experiencing serious health problems, including a heart attack, from her addiction. Linda was in a panic, not knowing what would happen to her and her young son who lived with her ex-husband and she desperately missed. She was at the lowest point of her life. One Sunday morning she wandered into a nearby church and sat in the last pew. Persons around her could not help but notice she was crying throughout the service. That morning Linda heard about Christ's love and forgiveness and how to make a new start in life. And in that moment the world started to look different to her. Linda returned the next Sunday and the Sunday after that, but she was reluctant to speak to anybody or fill out the visitors' card. One Sunday with trembling hands she filled out the card.

The church had a program of lay visitation. That week she was visited by two members of the church. One of the team that went to see Linda was Sally. Sally could see that Linda needed help and even though Linda was resistant, she let her continue to visit.

In time, with Sally and the people of the church welcoming her, opening their lives to her, praying for her, making God's love real and visible to her, Linda felt accepted and felt her faith grow. And while she accepted Christ in a moment, she spent months and years fighting her up and down battle with addiction, wrestling with her new found faith, dealing with doubts and fears. Unsure of how to be and live a committed Christian life. She lived her life with her feet in two worlds. And it was only when she hated her old life more, that she finally severed all ties with it. And in the process of admitting she needed God in her life,

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developing a prayer life, letting her faith guide her choices, and developing healthy relationships that she truly became a new person.

Years later Linda radiated with joy as she shared her victory over. "I want to share what I've found," she said with enthusiasm. "I want to work with young people hooked on drugs and alcohol. I want them to know there's hope!" Linda now works with teenagers who are addicted and need to not just hear about Christ's love and hope but see it in action through her witness and example.

Her open eyes and spirit allowed her to see and experience a new life that would have seemed only a dream before. Her transformation is unbelievable if it were not for the resurrection. For the risen Christ has brought her from a life leading to death, to new life. But, Are we willing to have our eyes opened?

The power of the resurrection is that it gives us a new day, a new life, a new way of seeing the world. The problem so often comes in though when we don't feel Christ's presence in our lives. Those disciples on the road to Emmaus got to see and touch and experience Jesus' presence. But what about us, when we are on that road to Emmaus, that road we take when we need to get away, when we are too tired, too worn out, too run down from life.

Do we sense Jesus coming up alongside us? Do we sense the presence of the one who is always alongside us? Do we recognize the power of a divine love that never turns away from us? So often in life I think we are so busy with an endless routine of activities. So busy just keeping up with life that we often miss Jesus when he is right beside us.

How often have we prayed seeking and yearning for God's presence in midst of doing something, when in reality God is already there just not in the way we expect. Perhaps the goal is to figure out that it has nothing to do with doing, saying, or showing. Maybe it's just about being. Maybe it's about pausing long enough to see the new life right in front of our face.

Once there was a man badly deformed from birth and was angry as he was growing up. He hated himself and others and was bitter toward God.

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Then there came a time when one of his neighbors invited him into a Sunday school class. This was a class that taught and learned, that shared fellowship at other times than just during the church school hour, and which was also involved in service projects.

Over a period of months this man began to be touched by what he was experiencing. One day it really came over him how much that group of people really loved him. It seemed impossible.

Another day he was struck by their Bible study which revealed again and again that God loves you as you are. "In Jesus Christ, know that God loves you." "Impossible," he thought.

Another day he was touched by the joy of the sharing of skills, money, and effort with others in meaningful, difficult service and mission projects. "I can't be doing this," he thought. "Impossible."

And suddenly, one day, he got up in the morning and looked in the mirror and with new eyes - realized that for the first time in his life he could say to the one looking back at him, "I love you." And he became a new man.

We are called this day to bring our lives into focus by making God's love real for those in our lives and the community around us – a love as real as that church did with this man. A love as real as the one revealed to those two men on the road to Emmaus when Jesus broke bread and shared his life – and their eyes were opened to who had been with them the whole time – in the midst of their hurt and pain and struggle they were not abandoned without help – and neither are we.

I invite us to continue walking with Jesus having our heart and hands and minds and souls opened and renewed as we continue on our journey with the work Jesus calls to – the work of justice, with the work of compassion, and mercy and forgiveness. As we take time to see those – really see those - who are not seen – love those who are loved – walk with those who have no one. As we go forward as a people of God ready to walk in trust and faith on the road of life. Remembering that oftentimes a walk is more than just a walk, especially when that walk is with Jesus. Amen.



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Amen.