

Luke 24: 13-35 “Delayed Recognition” Rev. Janet Chapman 4/19/26

Can you imagine trying to convince someone that you are actually alive? Not like you are trying to look awake when the pastor’s preaching and you feel like dozing off, but like having to prove you are not physically dead? That was the predicament for Charles Hubbard of Austin, TX. This Vietnam vet received a letter from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs informing him that he was dead and that his family needed to return thousands of dollars in benefits. Hubbard had become a victim of stolen identity as his VA checking account got closed and his pension benefits cut. After he made an extensive case for being alive, the VA informed him it would basically take 8 months for him to officially be brought back to life, and benefits restored. It appears that the resurrected Christ has also run into his own problems convincing folks he has been brought back to life.

Enter two travelers heading back to Emmaus from Jerusalem. Luke doesn’t tell us why they are going, what their agenda is, or why they have left Jerusalem. Maybe they left in fear, maybe in despair, maybe because they didn’t what else to do now that everything has changed. Their world has been turned upside down, going from celebration, conflict, violence, and death, and now the possibility that their martyred spiritual leader has come back to life. Resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion. It doesn’t fit into any world view, including the theology of resurrection held by first century Jewish people. They could imagine a resurrection of all humanity at the end of history, but not the resurrection of a single, solitary individual. So the two head out on a seven-mile walk home, They have about two hours for one of the most important human experiences one can have, a long walk with a good friend to figure things out. There is a flow to a good walk together. It begins with relief and a gratitude for companionship. A few times a week, I enjoy the companionship of my dog Sophie as we walk the River Trail, which takes us along shallow and steep rocky beaches, next to rapids and slow inlets of crystal clear water, through fields of wildflowers with butterflies darting from one to another, under various groves of trees with birds chirping loudly, and several ducks, geese, and egrets diving for hidden treasure in the

depths of the Sacramento. Such walks restore my sense of balance in more ways than one. When taken with a four-legged or two-legged friend, lives are shared, complaints are released into the winds, and concealed fears become revealed insights.

Questions are asked, reality is checked, compassion is rekindled, hearts heal, ideas flow, plans are made, and change is possible. Bruce Epperley, who came to speak with us years ago from Cape Cod, has a paperweight that says, “it will be solved in the walking.”

Now I don't need research to tell me walking can be a great antidote to fears, anxieties and burdens, but it doesn't mean it is the only avenue. Walking becomes a metaphor, in fact, for any sort of movement or journey through life. We are all on a journey— it is just the way it is. I know folks in their 80's who once were avid travelers, but who now stick close to home. “We don't feel the confidence we did when we were younger,” says one. “Our eyesight and hearing are not what they were. Our stamina and mobility are not what they were. We get lots of flyers for trips and tours. We look at them with interest and in the recycle bin they go.” Just because these folks stay put physically doesn't mean they aren't on a journey. There is a woman in her 20's who goes from one dead end job to another. That is a journey. It is true even for the man whose wife died and he now drinks more than he should, and says, “I'm not on a journey... I'm in free fall;” that is a journey as well. Everybody is on a journey, though such recognition can often get delayed.

On a journey to a place called Emmaus, that is actually nowhere on a map, which may be one of the points of our story, as this could be about a journey to anywhere, the two pilgrims are talking. The main topic is the narrow-minded, oppressive religious and governmental fanatics who attacked a good and honest man because he dared to confront the empire. The fanatics pressured the justice system to ignore its laws, whipped up a frenzied mob, and rushed the torturous execution of an innocent man. You may think the day after your candidate loses an election is bad, but it pales in comparison to state-sponsored terrorism designed to circumvent legal process and silence opposition. As the travelers are walking, they meet a stranger and

strike up a conversation. The stranger appears to be completely oblivious to the world around him. “What are you talking about?” the stranger asks. They respond, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have taken place in town over the last few days?” It’s like saying, “Wake up, dude!” The text tells us they don’t recognize him, indicating that at least one of them had met Jesus before but now his identity is hidden. Jesus responds, “Well, I did just go through a major life change; I’m not sure if that makes me woke exactly but tell me, what things?” “Well, it’s about Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet of mighty deed and word, an organizer and orator, totally intersectional, so of course, they silenced him. They claim it was all legal but there was no justice in this. We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel.” We had hoped. Todd Weir notes that for the grammar lovers, this is the “present imperfect” verb tense. It is used to convey that something in the past happened repeatedly, but it no longer happens in the present. The present imperfect; more than just grammar, it sounds like a state of being. It could easily become a book title by some mindfulness expert, “The Present Imperfect: Meditations for When Life Continues to Suck.” The point is they don’t hope anymore. And when you don’t hope, even though you hear of possibilities, you can’t quite summon any enthusiasm, because you can’t bear to be disappointed again. And please note it is very rare for hopeful people to leave town, to abandon a cause.

This is where Jesus throws a little curve ball. One wanders why he didn’t say what most angels and messengers from God say: “Be not afraid... Peace be with you... Take a closer look, it’s me Jesus. Now bring it in and give me a hug. Let’s get down to work.” Instead, Jesus fusses a bit at them saying, “How foolish you are being, how slow of heart to believe what the prophets and Moses told you.” He goes into teacher mode reminding them that it’s all about hope in the most improbable circumstances – Moses freeing the people from slavery, enduring 40 years in the wilderness, searching for the Promised Land where oppression no longer exists. The prophets relentlessly painting wild pictures of hope, of swords and shields being beaten into plowshares and pruning hooks. God hears the cries of the people and brings good news to the

poor. Now is not the time to give up hope. Whatever he said, he nailed it, or rather un-nailed it I guess since it's after Easter, because they want him to stick around for the night and share a meal. As they sit down to eat, it starts to come back to the travelers, where they have met this stranger before. Maybe the memories of other meals shared together start to surface; a bread and fish picnic where 5000 were fed or that last supper in an upstairs room just days before, when Jesus spoke of things they didn't understand and didn't want to hear. It's in the breaking of the bread that it all comes flooding back. Lee Hull Moses says it's when the flesh of the bread is torn and breadcrumbs fall to the table, scattering all around. In the midst of breadcrumbs, their eyes are finally opened and they see what's really happening. It's when he breaks the bread that they are brought back from the shadows of death and they realize that life has won. This is where the church lives – in the middle of this story between the abandoned linens of the empty tomb and the ascension to heaven. Yes, it's true we celebrate the birthday of the church on the fiery festival of Pentecost, but Pastor Lee insists this is where the church is born in this moment, in the breaking of the bread. We weren't there to see the rolled-away stone or hear the women tell the story. The great mystery of heaven lies far off – in comprehension, at least, if not in time. So here we are, in the middle. This is where the church lives – gathered around the table, telling old stories, sharing in the feast. It's in the scriptures and the table that the story breaks open for us, and we realize again that life has won. Our eyes are opened as blindness is healed, denial is overturned, and recognition finally arrives. We recognize that sometimes casual talk between friends can become holy and our hearts will burn with the Holy Spirit when we least expect it. We walk the journey to anywhere, never alone but accompanied by the Risen Christ, often in disguise, but always present. Christ's presence does not depend upon our recognition, but only on the love and grace of our Creator. Therefore, we learn to practice resurrection, as Eugene Peterson says, by keeping company with Jesus, alive and present, who knows where we are going better than we do. So let us continue to hope and keep our eyes open for glimpses of breadcrumbs everywhere we go, indicating that life just might win again.