

“An Unexpected Walking Companion”
Leviticus 26:3-5, 9-13;
2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Luke 24:13-35

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Sometimes on the road, we don't know which way to turn. We have experiences that fill us with a sense of loss or of grief. There are things we don't understand and we wonder how we might handle those struggles and what we might do with them. That's where those disciples were as they were walking on that road to Emmaus. They were full of questions. What just happened? How could it have happened? Why did it happen? They were filled with sadness. Sometimes it feels like with any loss we have, in some ways the sadness is in part about a loss of hope. There was a hope that we somehow no longer can have because of that loss we've experienced. They were pretty clear about that with Jesus, that they were sad.

Where do we turn when we're sad? There are a lot of offers today. Sometimes it feels like we live in a world that says everything will be taken care of. Technology will enable us to do whatever we want to do. So far technology has not offered me much consolation. Sometimes it's the opposite of consolation. Yet it is in the midst of that wondering about hardships, those moments in life when I can't understand what's happened, how it happened, why it happened— it's in those moments I have to think about where to turn. Those disciples, as they were walking to Emmaus, were full of those questions.

Sometimes I think of the Road to Emmaus story as iconic. If you know the idea of what an icon is supposed to do, it's supposed to draw you into the story or the description so you begin to have a fuller experience. The icon itself is a way to take a journey into faith. It's a way of seeing anew or allowing it to tell its story. In that way, I think this road to Emmaus walk is iconic. It is about that idea that we're on a journey and then we hit these moments where we run into incredible struggles, losses, grief— and we wonder which way to turn.

For these disciples, as they were walking along, they have one show up and begin to be in conversation with them, to begin to describe to them the nature of why and how and what just happened. They don't necessarily recognize who it is that is coming along with them. That Jesus can show up and not be known is always a question mark in my mind. Wouldn't we know Jesus if he showed up? Maybe not.

One of the interesting things about this is that it isn't until they're done that they are able to say, “Oh, yeah, we had these feelings that had some impact on our recognition that Jesus was with us.” I don't know how often we go through life and ignore our feelings, and wonder about emotions and whether they are useful or not. Yet here, as they conclude their time with Jesus, looking back, they are reminded that those feelings were there, attesting to God's presence with them, of Jesus walking with them.

It is as we hear these stories and we think about Jesus walking with them without being able to be seen, that I think about how often it may be that God is present in some way, but we can't see God. Oftentimes, I think we struggle a little bit with that. I do. I

sometimes just want God to sit down with me and talk to me and tell me what I need to know. But we live with a lot of things we can't really see but are present and active in our lives. I tend to think of physical things. Maybe that's my background, but I think of the wind. I can look out my window and see nothing until I see a tree bent sideways. I can't see the wind until I see its effect. There are a lot of things in our lives that we can't really see until we see their effect. I can look at somebody and I have no idea what they're thinking until I see its effect. The love we share—sometimes we can't see that until it's acted out. I think about light. We can't really see light. We see brightness. We see colors. But we don't see the photons. And yet, I want God to be real, and I think that perhaps I'm missing how God is real.

The disciples were wondering about what happened. They didn't see how God was at work in what had happened to Jesus. They could see the event. They could see the light, but they couldn't see what was in it. It says that as Jesus went along with them, he translated the scriptures for them. Maybe that's a work we do together; we translate what is happening, how God is at work among us. Together we act a little as the prism through which God works and we get to see the variety of colors and ways that God is among us, the very beauty that God brings to our lives.

He was an unexpected traveling companion. There are two things I think about this iconic view of the Walk to Emmaus. There was this idea that God showed up, and then there's this recognition that God showed up. It didn't happen for them until the breaking of the bread. Then they could look back and say they noticed it within, in their experience, as well.

They had an unexpected companion. Part of that may have been because of what they were talking about. They were sad. They were talking about what Jesus had done. They were wondering about what God had done. It's a hard conversation to have, but if we look at the Leviticus and the Second Corinthians passages today, they suggest that our companionship matters.

I've talked a lot about how God is impartial in terms of loving everyone, but that doesn't mean that everyone is good for our walk. That's a hard balance sometimes. How do we care for and love all people in the world, and yet recognize that in our walk of faith, we need companionship that understands that, that values what God has done, and that there's some way in which God seems to honor that. Sometimes I don't know how to deal with that. I don't know what to do with the idea that I'm supposed to love everyone, and yet also at the same time know that my companionship with people of faith will help grow my faith and will allow me to see God at work.

It's a way of saying that what we do matters. What we choose to do matters. That we come to worship matters. That we engage in the life of faith matters. It feels to me that part of what this iconic view of walking on our journey says to us is that it's also about us opening up to God, being available, being ready to recognize. I do believe that God wants to walk with us, but God is not going to force us on that journey. It's a choice we make by the companionship we share and the love we show. Amen.