

**Series: Joy in the Journey**

**Today: Cleopas**

**Text: Luke 24:13-35**

**A Communion Meditation preached by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.  
Sunday, May 2, 2010 (Fifth Sunday in Easter)  
First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

Four weeks ago we celebrated Easter, so it may seem strange that this morning we are still talking about it. Our text says-- "*that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles*": That same day; the day of the resurrection; Easter Day.

Our Early Word bible study found it interesting what I told our friends at Brightside a few weeks ago. In the liturgical traditions of what we call the "main stream" churches, we celebrate a season rather than just a day. Easter isn't just one Sunday. It is seven Sundays where we focus on the resurrection story beginning on Easter Sunday, and we continue until Pentecost when the risen body of Christ is entrusted to the Church. So we speak of Easter because we are still waiting for the Holy Spirit to empower us to be the church. Today is the fifth Sunday in Easter.

Today our journey of faith allows us to walk with a man named Cleopas and his traveling companion. On other Sundays I have tried to give you some historical background on the person we are observing, but today that is just not possible. The only thing we know about Cleopas is in this verse of scripture and possibly one other. In that other verse (John 19:25) we learn that standing at the foot of the cross are three women named Mary, and one of them is the wife of Clopas. It is quite possible that in copying the original manuscript a tired monk dropped a vowel, and this Mary at the foot of the cross is the wife of Cleopas. We cannot be sure. We just don't know about the man.

What we do know is that Cleopas was one of the lucky ones who got to experience, first hand, the resurrection of our Lord. So this common, of-no-consequence man, earns his place in the bible because of a powerful faith experience, and I want to suggest to you what he learned from his encounter with Jesus can make a difference in our own journey of faith: 1) The Risen Christ is willing to meet us right where we are; 2) The Risen Christ is wants us to be excited about our faith; and 3) The Risen Christ reveals himself in the midst of the common.

### **The Risen is willing to meet us right where we are**

The first thing to notice in our text is that there was nothing dramatic about the way Jesus encounters these two disciples. It is Easter morning. They had been in Jerusalem for Passover. They could not travel on the Sabbath, and they were simply headed home.

While they were walking, they discussed the events of the past few days. If the Mary mentioned in John's Gospel is the wife of Cleopas, it is even possible that this conversation was taking place between a husband and his wife which is what theologian Leslie Weatherhead suggests. They were undoubtedly discouraged. Things did not turn out as they had hoped. They believed he was the Christ, the messiah, the son of God, but their vision of how God would use the Messiah to restore the political fortunes of Israel hadn't worked out. They had hoped for one thing, and all they got was a dead leader, and they were disappointed.

The risen Christ meets them on the road, and he does not chastise them for their lack of faith. He lets them share their story, their disappointment, their shattered hopes, and he walked with them in their despair. Sometimes the best God can do is to walk with us in the midst of whatever it is that life brings our way until we discover for ourselves that the thing we long for the most is right heir with us: HIS PRESENCE!

A few weeks ago (March 22, 2010) *Time* magazine, featured an interview with South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In the interview he was asked: **After all you've seen and endured, are you really as optimistic as your book, *Made for Goodness*, says you are? (Zelalem Dawit, Addis Ababa).** Tutu responded: *I'm not optimistic, no. I'm quite different. I'm hopeful. I am a prisoner of hope. In the world, you have very bad people—Adolph Hitler, Idi Amin—and they look like they are going to win. All of them have bitten the dust. The grace of God remains.*

When asked: **What is your favorite Bible verse and why? (Satu Rahikainen)** Tutu: *Romans 5:8. "[While] we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It sums up the Gospel wonderfully. We think we have to impress God so that God could love us. But he says, "No, you are loved already, even at your worst." (Source: "10 Questions," *Time* magazine (3-22-10), p. 4*

This is the good news of the Emmaus Road. The risen Christ does not judge our faith or lack of it, but is One who meets us where we are, listens to our doubts and our questions, and translates the mysteries of faith into language we can understand when the time is right for us.

### **The Risen Christ is wants us to be excited about our faith**

This encounter with Cleopas also teaches us that when we truly welcome the presence of the risen Christ into our lives, we receive a renewed passion for ministry. *"Did not our hearts burn within us?" says Cleopas.* And the scripture says that when they recognized Jesus, their passion for sharing the good news returned with a vengeance. They ran back to Jerusalem, a seven mile journey. Their exuberance with the disciples was obvious; they simply could not contain themselves. They were compelled to share what they had experienced and what it meant to their lives. This is what happens to people who have experienced the presence of Christ as a reality in their lives. They wind up doing things that would be otherwise uncharacteristic.

The former congressman from Ohio, Rep. Tony Hall, was that kind of politician. While he was considered a conservative, his voting record reveals a man who was struggled with issues like health care, poverty and injustice which weren't on the conservative agenda. He was noted for not necessarily voting a party line, but he attempted to regularly put his faith into practice.

A few years ago (2005) Mr. Hall was the speaker at the National Prayer Breakfast, and he told the people who had gathered that early in his political career he made decisions primarily based on blind ambition. Then one week he was invited to breakfast with a group of men who described a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He said that breakfast set him on a spiritual journey that led him and his wife to become Christians.

Hall urged religious men and women of both parties not to be shy about bringing their faith to the office and letting it be part of who they are in public; not to wear it on their sleeve, but to allow it to influence the decisions they make and the relationships they form.

He described a trip he took to an Islamic country where he was greeted by the U.S. ambassador at the airport. "Congressman Hall, I just want to remind you that you're in a Muslim country. Don't talk about religion, or it could really set back what we're trying to accomplish here." Hall said he just nodded politely.

When they arrived at the office of the Muslim leader, Hall says he was asked why he had come to the country. "I would like to be your friend," Hall said. "I would like our countries to be friends. And I would like to invite you to join me this year at the National Prayer Breakfast, in the name of Jesus."

The Muslim leader got very excited. He slapped his knee and, according to Hall, said, "That is remarkable. You have come all this way to be my friend and to talk to me about Jesus. That is wonderful. My mother used to talk to me a lot about Jesus when I was a child. We should

talk about Jesus more often." Then the leader turned to the Ambassador and said, "Why don't you talk about Jesus?" [Source: *Joel Rosenberg, "Breakfast with the President," National Review Online, (2-4-05)*]

### **The Risen Christ reveals himself in the midst of the common**

Finally, Cleopas teaches us Jesus not only meets us where we are; that our encounter with Jesus should make our hearts burn with excitement; but he also teaches us that we will find Jesus in the midst of the commonplace if we are open to him. Our lesson tells us that when they came to Emmaus, the disciples invited Jesus to stay for dinner. He was a guest in their home. They invited him to say the blessing. And as he said the words of blessing over the bread, perhaps the same words he had spoken at the Seder table just a few days before, the scripture says, "*Their eyes were opened and they recognized him.*" Jesus had met them where they were, listened to their disappointment, helped them to translate mysteries of faith in language they could understand. Now they were open to experience the reality of God in their lives. When we are open to the reality of God in our lives, the same can happen to us; right here; in this place.

### **Invitation**

All we have to offer is bread and juice. However, no matter how many times you have come to this table, Jesus is ready to meet you here in bread that is broken and the cup that is poured. In the midst of simple elements prepared for you, Jesus is ready to touch your life, if you will allow him.