

PSALM 116:1-4, 12-19 (p. 494)

APRIL 30, 2017

LUKE 24: 13-35 (p. 859)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Just as you opened the minds of the fear-filled Disciples, Jesus, in that locked Upper Room, so that they could understand the truth of Scriptures, please open our minds now. We too often cower in the dark, and sometimes run away. And we too often fail to recognize you, even when you are walking right beside us. So please, reach out and touch us as well. Speak a word to our hearts Lord, and ignite them on fire, so that we will burn in Holy Passion for you! Amen.

“ON THE ROAD”

This week we move from the Gospel of John to the Gospel of Luke. And in chapter twenty-four, the very last chapter of Luke’s book, we find a whole series of encounters with the Risen Lord! We saw this in John too, and in Matthew and Mark and the first part of Acts. Luke’s target audience is Greek though, the wider world, whereas Matthew’s is primarily focused on the Jewish community. Luke’s stated goal is for us non-Hebrew folks, those maybe unfamiliar with all the Old Testament Prophecies about Messiah, to understand who Jesus really is! In fact he addresses his writing to “my most excellent Theophilus, a Greek name meaning “God-Lover”. So he is writing to all of us, who want a relationship with the Lord!

I love having four Gospels. It gives us perspective on all that happened. And when you look at each one in the light of the others, you can’t help but get a more complete picture of what really took place!

For some, that may seem like a bit of rerun. But for others it's background information. Or better yet, a lead in, like; "Previously on the Gospel of Easter"!

It's been an extraordinary day! It started off "very early in the morning," with the women heading out to the tomb carrying spices to anoint the body of Jesus. And in Luke, that first Easter ends very late that night, out in the hills near Bethany, as Jesus Ascends into Heaven right before the Disciples eyes! That part may have been a week later though. It's unclear if that was the night when Jesus came to the Disciples in the locked-room while Thomas was missing, or if it was the following week when he was there. Think back to last week's lesson. Regardless, in between morning and night, there is a whole lot more! Apparently Sundays were busy, even way back then!

It's early, in the pre-dawn shadows, before the sun has even crested the horizon, and several of the Disciple women wind their way through the streets of Jerusalem and arrive at the tomb. The stone has been rolled away. The soldiers are frozen in fear. And the tomb itself is empty! You probably remember most of this. There are a couple of angels sitting there as well, who try to explain that the Lord has risen from the dead! But the ladies are simply overwhelmed, as I'm sure you can imagine! They wonder what all of this could possibly mean!

So confused, they run back to tell the men. But the men can't just take their word for it. That would be like stopping to ask for directions, right, and these are men!

Peter and John take off running for the tomb themselves, and find it just exactly the way the women have described it! The strips of burial linen are lying there, on the floor. The cloth that covered Jesus' head is neatly folded, set off to the side! Jesus however, is not there! So Peter then, like Mary, starts walking away shaking his head, wondering what all of this means. More happens after that, including Mary talking with the Risen Jesus. But let's just jump ahead a bit.

It's now evening on that very first Easter. We talked about it some last week as well. The Disciples are scared, hiding behind locked doors, when suddenly Jesus comes and stands among them! And His Presence, His Power, His Heaven-sent Peace, remember, actually allows them to see the truth! Except Thomas of course, who had to run through the whole thing again a week later! Are you with me?

Well sandwiched between these two encounters, between Easter morning at the Empty Tomb and Easter evening in the Upper Room—between Jesus appearing to Mary and the others in the Garden, and Jesus appearing to the Ten, that night, behind locked doors—Luke tells us about a Road Trip. Like I said, it was a big day! And I love this part!

Two believers, “Two of them,” it says, two followers of Jesus, a guy named Cleopas and an un-named friend, are out “on the road”! They left the city of Jerusalem and are heading to the nearby village of Emmaus. It's a one-day journey, roughly sixty stadia we're told, somewhere around seven miles or eleven kilometers. It'd be like walking from here to the scenic overlook on M-22, just north of Arcadia, only in 90 or 100 degree

heat!

As they walk, they talk about everything that has happened in their lives in the last few days. That's normal, right? Maybe they are scared, or confused as they leave town, or curious or conflicted? Maybe they are peopled out. That happens too, you know. Maybe they are simply heading back home after the holiday celebration. In any case, they are immersed in conversation, contemplating all that has happened and what it might possibly mean—wondering aloud the very same things Peter and Mary were wondering! None of them get it, even though they've been told!

They decide to jump right back to the old routine—back to the ordinary—back into every-day life! They are clearly not expecting anything unusual to happen, right? Then suddenly Jesus comes alongside of them! It's what He did with the others too, by-the-way—at the Garden, in the Upper Room, and later on a beach for breakfast! The Risen Lord falls right into step alongside of the travelers, right into the midst of what they're doing! But here's the thing; they don't recognize Him!

They are so immersed in their conversation, talking about everything that has happened! They know the details, obviously! They are clear on what has transpired with Jesus! They even know the rumors, about the women finding the tomb empty, and the men confirming it, and about the ladies having a conversation with angels! They know about the guards laying on the ground in panic! They know!

I don't know if they believed it or not, but they've heard the Good News! They know Jesus was a Prophet! They even say so to the stranger! They know He was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God, and all the people! They know the promise of Messiah from Scripture, and had even thought that Jesus might be Him! And yet they couldn't put it all together—not in their head, and certainly not in their heart! In fact, we're told that they are “downcast” as they walk along!

That might sound familiar! We see it all the time. We experience it ourselves even from time-to-time! Folks receive the facts, hear the promises, know all the stories and rumors about the Resurrected Lord, but still don't believe! How many times have you heard the reports that Jesus is alive, from trusted friends even, and yet you just didn't understand! Maybe you too have gone to the Empty Tomb yourself, to check it out. Maybe you have even seen a miracle or two, heard numerous teachings, and yet for some reason you're still downcast, or maybe even running away! You just don't recognize Jesus, even though He is standing right beside you!

I wonder if the traveler with Cleopas is unnamed on purpose, so that we can relate! We too have discussed things with other would-be believers, sometimes quite extensively. We too know the facts. We too are “theologically astute,” discerning even. We've got the traditions down too! We show up for all of the required religious celebrations, like Passover and the Day of Atonement, Christmas and Easter, or two times a month! We travel to the Holy Mountain of God, just as required! And we want to believe, we really

do! Maybe we even have in the past!

But you haven't heard the voice of God for quite some time, have you, or seen His smile, even though He is walking there right beside you! You recently shared a meal with Him. Just a week ago you marched together in a parade. A couple of days ago you prayed with Him even, in an Upper Room, then reenacted the Passover! He washed your feet. He broke the bread. But now, on Sunday afternoon, you don't even recognize Him!

Why do you think that is? What causes spiritual blindness? Is it contagious, do you think? Fear plays a role. Sometimes worry over "what will happen next" does as well. Guilt is a causative agent too; "could I have done more to help Jesus when He needed it"! Grief adds to visual impairment; "I feel so empty right now. I miss those bygone days"! And then of course there is everyday life that gets in the way! Can you imagine having to pack up all of your things, and then walk all that way to Emmaus!

Maybe expectations for the journey, is the problem! Mary expected to see a gardener, not the Risen Lord, so at first, that's who she saw! Maybe there'll be potholes along the way, or great big hurdles! "We had hoped that He was the promised Messiah, who would come and restore Israel"! We thought He would act just like we expected Him to act!

...Tell me, what is it that blinds you? That's really the question, isn't it, on your personal journey? What keeps you from recognizing Jesus walking beside you?

How about all of the "theological bantering", by all the so-called experts? Scholars, for instance, can't seem to pinpoint an exact location for the ancient village of Emmaus.

Does that create a “pothole” for you?

Archeologists have discovered the ruins of a town about seven miles from Jerusalem, where Emmaus should be. Only there is no conclusive evidence that it was ever called Emmaus! Is that a distraction for you? There is another town though, one which the First Century Historian Josephus calls Immaus, spelled with an “I” instead of an “E”. But it’s sixteen miles from Jerusalem, not seven! Does that put a speed bump in your journey of faith? ...Would it smooth out at all to learn that ancient Hebrew didn’t use vowels? The “I” versus “E” makes no difference at all! What I am trying to say is, sometimes our blinders just aren’t that rational!

Scholars don’t know for sure who was traveling with Cleopas that day, so even that is a hang-up for some. Some suggest that it was his wife, while others propose his daughter. Still traditions speculate that it was Peter, or Jesus’ brother James! For detail oriented, historical theologians, unknowns like this can be a problem! ...But in reality, does not knowing his or her identity, make the intended lesson any less true?

I understand “Quantifiable Thinking”! It’s my own preferred ways of processing information! Folks like me want statistics, facts and figures, and reproducible results! The problem is “Qualifiable Thinking”, thoughts on beauty, and emotion, on right and wrong, and good and evil, tend to then get relegated to second place. Or left out all together!

But try to describe something beautiful, or awe-inspiring with “why”. It tends to miss the

point! Water vapor, refracting light, breaking down a visible single beam into its various wavelengths, doesn't really capture the essence of a rainbow, does it?

I imagine Cleopas and his companion as two wayward sheep that have somehow squeezed out through a hole in the fence after the tranquility of their pasture has been upset! A great big Roman wolf, or a huge Sanhedrin lion, has come into their lives and scattered the flock! And these two self-preserving sheep have decided to "get out of Dodge"! They are hiding now, just like all the rest of the Disciples, only these two are running as well, or at least walking fast! So what I see is the Good Shepherd coming to these stragglers, out on the road to Emmaus, to bring them back safely to the fold!

Luke says that as they walked along they were deep in discussion. The Greek word for "discussion" also means "to question" or "search out". It 's the same word used at the Last Supper when the Disciples are questioning who it is Jesus is saying will later betray him! There is a query out on the road. A deep discussion is taking place, one with serious questions!

Maybe that's why they didn't recognize Jesus when he walked up to them? Maybe they were lost in thought or debate? That might be us as well? Maybe it was because there were so many other travelers on the road that day. Jerusalem would have been filled to the brim for Passover, you know. Maybe we are so involved with others, that we miss that still quiet voice? Or maybe the travelers are just turned inward, tuning out all of the noise and confusion around them? People do that too you know! ...One thing is certain; they didn't recognize Jesus, even as He walked beside them!

I understand distraction. I really do! But can we afford to miss, God in our midst? I know we get caught up in problems too, so much so at times that even when we read the Scriptures we cannot discern what it really means! I see us in the church universal become so involved in talking “about” Jesus, like those on the road, all that He has done, that we miss out entirely on talking “with Him”!

The Disciples know the facts. It’s the Person they don’t recognize! Their minds are open, in fact filled with information. But now Jesus needs to work on their hearts. They know the Scripture, all about Moses and the Prophets! They just don’t know what it means! It took Jesus speaking to them, personally explaining things, in order to warm their hearts! And it took reclining at the table with Him, relaxed and receptive, in order for them to see! It took Jesus “Breaking Bread, and Giving Thanks” to open their eyes!

Does any of this speak to you about need for church? Discussing Scripture in order to understand! Sharing in the Sacrament of Communion! Recognizing Jesus for who He really is, and Worshipping Him as Lord! And then, stepping out to share the Good News with others!

Where are you on the journey! That is definitely question number one! But then, what are you doing to take the next step of faith—to become a follower and not just a fan? And all of God’s people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Oh Lord, maker of heaven and earth, we praise your Holy name. You are just and loving and full of grace. We are honored to be called your people, and blessed by your Spirit living in our hearts. And we are happy to share that Truth with those we meet.

Thank you Lord for calling us out of the busyness of our lives and into this family, into this church, into this fellowship that meets in your Name. Thank you for calling us this morning to a short time of sanctuary and peace, out of the world and into your Presence. And thank you for whispering to our hearts and our spirits, with that voice of love from your Spirit, as we sit now at your feet.

Lord, as we slow down and take some time to reflect in your Holy presence, there are some concerns that trouble our minds. A few of these we have just shared with you in our silent prayers, while others are still unvoiced. And yet we do realize that you are already aware of them. You search our hearts, and you know our minds, and you love us even deeper than we realize. So Lord, hear us now as we continue to share. We lift up before you.....We lift up these friends and loved ones Lord, asking you to care for each of them as only you can do. We lift them up, asking that you will be present in their lives, opening up their hearts to you. And we lift them up Father, asking that you will grant health and healing, life and love, protection and tranquility to each and all. We make these requests in Jesus' name, and pray together now in the way that He has taught us saying, Our Father...