

Luke 24:13-35
Walking with God
Sunday April 30th, 2017

The Walk to Emmaus scripture that was read today is the traditional scripture that is read on the Sunday two weeks after Easter. It tells of events that happened the afternoon and evening of Easter, another version of which we read and talked about last week. It speaks of two men walking with God one named Cleopas and the other unnamed who is you and me.

In Genesis 2:8 it speaks of “**God walking about in the garden in the cool of the day.**” with Adam and Eve. This was the image of the close fellowship of God with human beings before the Fall; Adam and Eve strolling around in the garden fellowshiping with God.

I love the image of our close fellowship with God as that of walk.

My wife and I, as often as we can, and our schedules and weather allow, go walking together. I call these excursions “walk and talks”. These are times when we go out together and reconnect without the distractions of TV, work and cell phones.

Walking by myself is also a time in which I fellowship with God. I walk in the mornings for an hour most days of the week, except Sundays, when I take a shorter walk. I lift up my requests to God for various people and events and listen to God as I contemplate what to do as a pastor. I walk about 100 to 150 miles a month on average.



As you can guess I meet a lot of people on my morning walks. I meet runners, dog walkers, joggers and others. I used to just let them go on by. I'd smile sometimes; but then when I got involved in **Building a Discipling Culture**, the book and theology that I teach in Huddle Groups; I realized that these people I meet, I don't meet by accident.

The meetings are “**divine appointments**” and so I changed my attitude and actions. I began making deliberate attempts to get to know the people I met: names, life stories and even philosophies of life for some.

To many, I’m just Fred the man who walks with a cup of coffee, but to some they know when they walk with me they walk with God. Wow!! Does that sound egotistical, but let’s pause and look at that. Some think that, because they know I am a pastor; but it goes deeper than that. It goes back to my baptism, your baptism at which we received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Do you know that when people walk with YOU they too walk with God?

You have the Holy Spirit within you (for you have been baptized) and when you are out and about the Spirit that is within you calls out to the Spirit within the other. Remember as Acts 2 states, “**The Spirit has been poured out on all flesh.**”

And Jesus said, “**Whenever you have done these things to the least of these you have done it unto me.**”



The mystery is we bring Jesus to those who already have met Jesus in the Spirit, but like the two disciples in our scripture today they don’t know it is Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit in us that is calling out to the Spirit in the other to recognize Christ who is present with us. Whenever we meet someone walking there are always three people present: us, them and the Spirit of Christ.



People you connect with, as you walk through life, as you live into your journey of faith; these people you connect with are **People of Peace**

whom God has placed into your life. I am going to talk a lot about People of Peace in the coming weeks.

But, it is up to you, through the Spirit and relationships you build, and eventually the words of life about Jesus that they will come to faith in Jesus. Jesus will not just be a mystery that is unknown, but he will become known through your walks and talks. And at times He will become known through the breaking of the bread, which is next week's topic.

In our scripture today we see two important ways for people to come into a saving faith with Jesus. One is simply the walk and talk with Jesus as you walk and talk with someone about faith, the other is breaking bread with them. I walked and talked with one man for 5 years before he said to me one day, "I believe in God, I really do!"

I know I told this story before but the illustrative purposes of it are so good. Our first meeting was not so good. We, being men, when we meet, often share almost right off the top what we do or did for a living. I told him I was a pastor. He immediately replied, "I am an atheist". He was a Person of Peace for me, though, so through the years we walked and talked about a lot of things: philosophy, politics, creation and of course faith and most of the time we didn't agree.

But, I accepted him for who he was and he me, but I am an incurable evangelist; so I worked on him and one day (after only a short 5 years) this person whom I first thought I never could reach (and I was right) the Holy Spirit touched him and gave him the gift of faith, and he believed.

Now when you join Vista Church we give you a walking stick as a symbol of you joining us in the walk of faith. It is also a reminder as we go out into the world, into the "Walks of Life" as it is called, for each one of us there are "people of peace" God has placed in our lives to disciple.

That indeed is our purpose as a church. Look on the front cover of our bulletin. You will see the mission statement of the United Methodist Church **"To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the**

world.” That transformation happens, one person of peace at a time, as we are open and looking for them as we walk about our lives.

Now I know some think that it is all well and good for you Pastor Fred to find people of Peace and disciple them, but who am I? I have no gifting or training or encouragement. Well if you are baptized you already have that gift of the Holy Spirit within you to do this work, and if you are open I and others I have trained, can encourage and train you.

Gerry Alberts, who is in my huddle group, caught the vision of People of Peace. She kept meeting Bob and Eileen Herd on their morning walk. They struck up conversation, they made friends, they built a relationship and Gerry invited them to Vista Church. They joined as members last month. Now the goal of reaching out is not Church membership it is Christian discipleship, but Eileen and Bob joined Vista and here is what they say about this experience.

Dear Pastor Fred,

I wanted to write to you, and tell you about Eileen's and my perception of our membership in the "Vista" church, and what it means to us. This July 21st we will celebrate our 50th anniversary. For those many long years, due to Eileen being Catholic, and me being Protestant, we danced around affiliating with a church, even though we both missed the closeness we felt by being near the Lord.

It literally took one of Jesus' Disciples, in the name of Gerry Alberts to get us to feel comfortable enough to attend a service, and experience what the "Vista" church had to offer. Gerry lives at the other end of our block, and we meet each other often on our walks. After several meetings, Gerry simply asked us if we would like to attend church with her next Sunday. We looked at each other, and both said, "well, sure!"

That one simple question from Gerry has added the most beautiful dimension to our lives, and we can't thank her enough! We are so blessed to be walking close to God again, hearing your sermons, and we really enjoy being a part of God's family at Vista De Las Montana church! Thank you, Gerry! Bob & Eileen Herd

Now some are probably thinking yes that is great, but I do not know what to say. Well the Holy Spirit will lead you in what to say. Your job is simply to invite and love people into the Kingdom. It is developing an attitude and action of invitation. Invite people to be here in this spiritual space where Christ is present in so many people's lives that a person can hardly resist what they experience.

Oh, I seek ways, and some seek ways to engage people into a conversation to see if someone is a person of peace. I wear my UMC Cross and often wear various Christian T-shirts to strike up conversations.

But in the end what our story today tells us is that salvation is a gift! Recognition of Jesus as our risen Lord is a gift, a gift of the grace of God. And in the case of our story the recognition came around a kitchen table in a humble Hebrew home.



And it came as a gift. Think about it, these 2 disciples had all the facts necessary to conclude that Jesus was the Christ who had risen from the dead, and yet they did not recognize him and they didn't believe.

First of all they had the experience of Jesus' life and teaching and miracles. They had walked with him, eaten with him and listened to him before he was crucified. They had actually seen his miracles, heard his predictions of his suffering, death and resurrection, and yet they didn't believe.

Second, they had the testimony of the Marys' and the empty tomb. They had the reported testimony of the angels, and yet they didn't believe.

Third, they had the testimony of the scriptures. Jesus himself as he walked with them explained prophecies of his suffering, death, and resurrection, and yet they didn't believe.

Now we have not walked with Jesus in the flesh, nor had him in person draw close to us and explain the scriptures. But we have heard the testimony of believers. We have read the scriptures, and yet it is still possible to not recognize the resurrected Lord for that recognition is a gift of God.

And it is granted to those who earnestly seek him. And yet the gift is not the result of seeking. It is a gift! And that is the mystery we experience and live with, we who believe.

The disciples that day, Cleopas and the unknown one, who is you and I, they, “strongly urged Jesus to stay with them.” Because “Jesus acted like he was going further.”

Jesus then revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread.

Now God does not hide the gift, nor withhold the gift for “Now is the day of your Salvation” is what the Scripture states, but God grants this gift to those who earnestly seek him, which is what Cleopas and the other disciple did that day by strongly urging Jesus to stay with them, for the scriptures also say, “Seek the Lord and he shall be found.”

But so many, I feel, just let Jesus walk on by as he would have that day if the 2 disciples hadn’t invited Jesus in to dinner. For some Christ disappears before the breaking of the bread and not after.

Ah, the mystery of the Christian faith. We can hear faith witnessed to, we can study it in the Bible, we can earnestly and doggedly seek after it; we can hear it preached, and yet, in the end, the faith that saves us is not something we achieve. It is a gift!!!!

We often find that the one we sought so hard has all along been seeking us, walking at our side, opening the scriptures to us, knocking at our door, and fellowshiping with us at the table.

And when the time is right and our hearts and minds have been prepared we receive that gift that we so desperately sought, which is

faith. The One you have been seeking is here ready to reveal himself to you, to give you that personal knowledge of his presence in your life.

I keep going back to this profound verse Eph. 2:8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

The most amazing work you can be involved in is making a disciple of Jesus Christ for the results of that work are eternal. You can learn how to do this by being part of a Huddle group. For the last year I have been training a group of people how to do this. How to listen to God, find people of Peace and love them into the Kingdom.

In a few weeks we are starting new groups. I may lead one while others are starting several others. If you are so called by God, ie you are intrigued by learning how to do this write your name down and give it to me and you will be contacted. I am going to make this invitation for the next several weeks. The book costs \$22.

I close with this. The week before last I took about half my Huddle group to Basha’s to simply pray for people as they walked by as a spiritual exercise to being open to finding People of Peace. Wow did the Spirit show up!! We were handing out coupons for free coffee at the Starbucks for to find People of Peace you have to be one.

People asked for prayers, people opened up in tears to share the agonies of their hearts and lives. We prayed with a first responder. We prayed with people for their health concerns who sat with us. We invited people to worship here and we did it as naturally and positively as you would talk about your favorite sports team.

Jesus was revealed, not exactly in the breaking of the bread though some ate lunch with us. But in the sharing of that holy UMC drink... coffee!! It was amazing! Next week you will hear in more detail actual testimonies as we talk about **People of Peace and Dining with God**. In Jesus’ name, Amen.