

“Walking Together”

Introduction: A few weeks ago, we were walking together down the road to Emmaus, the post-resurrection account that Luke 24 records for us, but then covid knocked us off our feet! Gratefully, we’re able to get back on that road today! When we left our fellow travelers, they were sadly trudging the 7 miles back to their home, to the village of Emmaus, after what had to have been a nerve-wracking and gut-wrenching weekend in Jerusalem. That weekend had included watching the horrific crucifixion of Jesus on Friday, sharing unimaginable grief with his friends on Saturday, and then wondering what the future would hold as they made their way home on Sunday. A rumor had begun to circulate that his tomb was empty, but that only seemed to punctuate their disappointment and despair.

“But we had hoped...” This was the operative emotion we noticed in our first look at this account. Along with many others, these two had hoped that Jesus was the long-awaited redeemer to come who would rescue them from Roman oppression, but he turned out to be nothing of the sort. As we reflected on their broken dreams, we reflected on our own. We thought about those places in our lives where our hope is waning, and then invited Jesus, as we made our way to the table, to come alongside us and begin to restore our hope, just as he had for those two travelers, as he invited them to enfold their story of lost hope within his larger story of living hope.

So, as we return to the road this morning, we want to notice the phrases: “two of them” (v. 13) and “stay with us” (v. 29). These phrases highlight for us, particularly after having just received new members, the importance of community, of walking together as we journey on this road called faith.

I. Two of Them – One Another

A. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but generally, when it’s time to pray the Lord’s Prayer together, I say something like, “and now let us celebrate the community into which God has called us, as we pray together the family prayer that Jesus has taught us . . .” I begin that way, with the reminder of community and family, because the very first word of the prayer is a plural one, the word “our.” And that plural voice continues throughout the prayer: give *us* this day *our* daily bread, forgive *us our* debts as *we* forgive *our* debtors, do not lead *us* into temptation, and deliver *us* from evil . . . In other words, we declare as we begin to pray, no matter where we’re praying or who we’re praying with, that this Christian journey we’re on is not meant to be a solo event; it is communal. Yes, Jesus rescues us as individuals, and into a personal relationship with himself. At the same time, he rescues us into a family, into a community called the church. All of which reveals that we’re not meant to walk this journey ... in fact we can’t really walk it ... alone. We need one another.

Illustration: Admittedly, that’s a struggle for many. Polls indicate that 90% of Americans say they believe in God. 80% believe that prayer is important. But only 45% indicate that they regularly attend public worship services. And those statistics were before covid and its detrimental effects on gathering together! All of which highlights that well over half of those who say they believe in God do not consider Christian fellowship or corporate worship to be important. They think you can live the Christian life on your own, in a sort of privatized faith.

B. Which is one of the reasons I find the picture of “two of them” walking on the road together so compelling. They were not walking alone, and they weren’t just out for a stroll. As they were walking,

they were talking about and discussing, quite intently, it seems, “everything that had happened,” from their Passover celebration, to the crucifixion, to the rumor of the empty tomb. Whether they were verbal processors or not, the events of the last few days had been so significant, so troubling, that they simply needed one another to open their hearts to, someone with whom to speak openly and honestly about what had impacted them so deeply. They needed to be in community, to walk with one another.

C. It’s not for nothing that as the NT writers describe what life looks like as a follower of Jesus, that the phrase “one another” is frequently used. It appears almost two dozen times, ranging from your basic “love one another” and “encourage one another,” to “carry one another’s burdens,” “accept one another,” “do not envy one another,” and “confess your sins to one another,” etc. (There’s a full list on the table downstairs.) I can’t help but wonder if these writers had some of the OT wisdom in mind:

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Pv. 27:17). Or “Two are better than one . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves (Ecc. 4:9-12).

All sorts of wisdom is contained in these verses aimed toward how we need others to help us grow, be protected, and just live life well in God’s care. We really have no hope of doing so alone. As we are reminded each year on Mother’s Day, which we celebrated a few weeks ago, each of us has been born of one. It signifies that we are marked by dependence on others from our very beginning. Or, as my brother-in-law has written: “Belly buttons are the unmistakable testimony to the fact that, even before they are born, people cannot live without others” (Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, p. 176). This is a value we hold dear, as expressed in our vision statement: “Receiving and extending the hospitality of Jesus as we connect with God, *one another*, and our community.”

D. In this vein, I can’t help but notice how their ability to discern the presence of Jesus progressed throughout the story, from seeing him as stranger, then as traveling companion, then as teacher, then as guest, then as host, and finally as their Messiah and resurrected Lord. I think it’s fair to say that being together with another greatly facilitated this increase in sight. So, this phrase, “two of them,” begins to give us a bit of a picture, on the day of resurrection, of the importance of walking together as we follow Jesus and seek to live the life he lays out for us.

## II. Stay with Us – Stability

A. A second phrase might be a little less obvious but is equally important in this regard. It’s the phrase “stay with us.” Here’s the context once again:

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. [24:28-29]

B. This phrase points toward the importance of stability in community as we walk together. As Ruth Hailey Barton points out, the discipline of staying together is quite significant to the outcome of this story. We see it in the beginning, as the two choose to stay with each other and walk together, leading to all sorts of learning possibilities along the way, and then we see it at the end when they intentionally invite Jesus to stay with them, opening up even more possibilities for insight and growth as the three share a meal.

C. This need for stability might not be so obvious to us because we live in such a highly transient culture, one in which we can move easily from place to place as we move from job to job, high school to graduate school, and vacation adventure to adventure. Spiritually, there are so many choices in front of us that we could probably attend a different church each week for six months and not have to drive more than 15 minutes! We can move to a different preacher, to a different worship style, to different music, to a different denomination, to a different group of people, at the drop of a hat. And in this virtual world, now we don't even have to leave home to do that!

It is, in fact, quite easy to leave a church! In the past nearly 28 years with you, I have seen many people come and go. Sadly, over that time, I can count on only one hand those who have left and who have gotten in touch with me to let me know or share their reasoning. Most just disappear. Some I hear about months or years later. Others I never do.

D. Certainly, having a choice is not a bad thing. But here's the dangerous thing: Being easily able to move along, or to worship for an extended period without anyone else around, could keep us from having to work things out, and from growing in the process. It could in fact be that the first century church, to which the NT letters were first addressed, heard so much "one another" instruction because they had no other choice. In general, there was only one church per city so they couldn't easily run from their issues, or from that person, or from that place, but had to stay and work things out. And in the working out comes growth, comes spiritual formation, as painful as the process sometimes is. Had these three left each other too soon, possibilities for learning and growth could have been missed.

E. Now, some of you might be thinking, yes, but didn't we just read that after the disciples' eyes were opened, and they recognized him, Jesus suddenly disappeared? We did, so, what's up with that?! Well, it's not the first, nor the last time, he would do that. His disappearance was unique, I would suggest, in that he was now helping his followers begin to think about what it would mean to follow him now that he was alive and planning to return, soon, to the Father. They would need to learn to relate to him in a new way, through faith and not sight. And they would need one another to help them do that.

Sometime this week take another look at the list of one another's. Which one stands out to you as something you could use from another? Which one stands out to you as something you could offer to another? Who might you invite to walk with you?