

“Seeing The Big Picture”

Luke 24:13-35

April 26, 2020

What do you talk about when you are with strangers? Well, these days if you are in line waiting to go inside the grocery store or waiting to check out at Lowes Home Improvement, there's really only one thing we're talking about: The Coronavirus. How these are unusual days, sad days, challenging days, and when is this going to end?

On the afternoon of Jesus' resurrection, people were also talking to each other and to strangers about just one thing: What happened to Jesus, and how it was a sad time and a challenging time. What surprised the two followers of Jesus in our Gospel lesson is when Jesus appeared to them on the road (without revealing who He was), He acted like He wasn't even aware of the current events of the day. In fact, one of Jesus followers, named Cleopas, even asks Jesus if He was from out of town since He didn't seem to know what was going on.

These two disciples had all the pieces of what had taken place, but they couldn't seem to put the puzzle together. They knew Jesus was a powerful prophet of God and they had hoped that He would be the one to restore the nation of Israel to great power and prominence, as it was in the days of the Old Testament under King David. But, He was handed over to the authorities where He was tried, sentenced to death, and crucified. Now it was 3 days since all of this had happened, but there were some women who were reporting that they had seen a vision of angels at Jesus' tomb who announced that Jesus was alive, but they didn't see His body. Some of their friends went to the tomb to check out this information and they also found the tomb to be empty, but they didn't see Jesus either. Their hearts were filled with sadness and confusion.

Today many people seem to get their religion or their spirituality in bits and pieces – a little here from a book they have read, some there from TV, and a variety of pieces from the internet. The problem is that in today's spiritual discussions, Jesus seems to be at best misunderstood or at worst, missing altogether.

When these disciples put the pieces they had together, it appeared to be a dark gloomy picture. Their hopes were ruined, their dreams were dead with the death of Jesus. But why was His body not in His tomb? Did angels really appear to some women and announce He was alive? What did all of this mean? The problem was they had all of this information, all the facts, but they were missing the big picture. Have you ever tried to tell somebody something, but they just didn't get it? That's what Jesus (appearing as a stranger) says to them in Verse 25. He says, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” In other words, the prophets had said repeatedly that the Christ would suffer and die, but would rise from the dead 3 days later, but they just didn't get it. And many times we don't seem to get it.

Apart from God, we are spiritually blind. Our sin separates us from God and none of us, by our own ability, can really believe in Jesus as our Savior. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. It is the Holy Spirit who comes to us and enables us to believe in Jesus and the power of His resurrection.

Think of it like these cables. In order to connect two pieces of electronic equipment – TVs, DVD players, our smartphones, computers, and so forth, we need the right hardware – proper cables like these – for one to properly receive input from the other. The Holy Spirit is like these cables, because without the Holy Spirit, we are unable to receive input from God. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “A person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Jesus opens the box, that being the Scriptures to these disciples that contained all of the pieces to the Big Picture Puzzle and as He walked with them He turned their journey to Emmaus into a Bible class. He begins to put these pieces together by telling them about Moses and what the prophets had to say, and He goes on to explain what was said in the Scripture concerning himself. Later, as the two disciples look back on everything they experienced, they talk about how their hearts were burning with wonder and joy as Jesus explained the meaning of Scripture to them.

As Jesus opened their eyes and put the pieces together for them, they finally saw the “Big Picture,” that Jesus really was alive when He sat down with them, took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. They recognized Him, and then, He disappeared. As a result, these followers of Jesus return to Jerusalem to find the original 11 disciples to tell them the incredible news that Jesus was alive. Their hope in Jesus as their Savior had been renewed by His presence among them and they end up telling others this amazing news.

So what about us? Two weeks ago we celebrated the Good News that Jesus rose from the dead and had defeated sin, death, and the power of Satan forever. So now what? What is our next move? Do we see God's Big Picture and how we fit into it? If all we're going to do as a result of Easter is say, "Christ is risen! Alleluia!" and nothing else, then we might as well join all those people who shouted "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday and then went on to shout "Crucify Him!" on Good Friday. The people on Palm Sunday in Jesus' day thought Jesus was going to be their earthly king and relieve them from the tyranny of the Roman government, but when that did not happen they lost hope.

Maybe you know people who celebrated Easter a few weeks ago, but as this pandemic continues they are starting to lose hope. There are certainly times when all of us don't know how to answer the question, "Now what?" Right now it seems like we don't know what the future holds. But Easter is more than just a reminder of the life we will have in God's heavenly kingdom someday. The gifts of Jesus' victory over death that He won for us on Easter continue throughout our earthly lives and He wants us to use those gifts in special ways.

Here's what I mean. When I was in college my aunt would call me from time to time to ask me what I did with the money she sent me for my birthday or a special holiday. She wanted to encourage me to spend it on things that mattered and not on things that did not fit into the overall picture of graduating. Well, Jesus does the same thing. He wants us to spend or use what He gives to us on things that fit into the overall picture of the Christian life. He too does not want us to waste what He gives to us. So on Easter Jesus approached these two disciples on the road to Emmaus to help them continue their journey of faith, and as a result of His visit, their hearts were restored with the hope they once had, they continued to believe in Jesus as their Savior, and they began to tell the others the incredible news that Jesus was alive, just as He and the prophets had said would happen. They saw their place in the Big Picture of the Christian life, and the answer to the question of "Now What?" was for them to go and tell others.

Jesus is a stranger to many people in our world today, but He is a stranger who wants to be a friend to all people. We, as followers of Jesus, are to be different from the people of this world. We might look the same, but hopefully our words, actions, attitudes, and priorities give us away as believers in Jesus. People might look at us, at the way we behave and the hope that we have in this pandemic and ask, "Are you just visiting here? Do you not know what's happening?" Hopefully we stand out from nonbelievers. Why? Because life with Jesus is a life filled with hope. After Jesus rose from the dead, His next step was to minister to people, so that our next step might be to tell others the news that Jesus is risen, and that changes everything. My prayer is that others who do not yet see the Big Picture of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, those lost in the darkness of despair, emptiness, and hopelessness, may more and more be able to recognize Jesus in us, in what we say and do, so that they will want to know more about a life that is filled with hope and joy even during these unusual, sometimes sad, and challenging days.