

April 19, 2009 Luke 24:13-35 "Walk to Emmaus" by Richard Boatman

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵...Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but **they were kept from recognizing him.** ¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" ...¹⁸One of them... asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. ... ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb... ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." ²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸As they approached the village ²⁹...**they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening..." So he went in to stay with them.** ³⁰When he was at the table with them, **he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.** ³¹**Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared...** ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

On Palm Sunday an excited crowd celebrated the Messiah. Five days later a lynch mob cried *Crucify him!* And with every nail driven into Jesus' hands and feet, hope died and despair took its place. Such was the morose discussion between two of Jesus' followers as they walked the seven miles to the village of Emmaus.

Have you ever been disappointed? Have you had something happen that rocked the foundation of all you hoped and dreamed about? What do you do? How do you handle it? Larae and I recently visited with Sara Anderson at the University of Iowa hospital. Twins Lucy and Garrett were born to Marc and Sara. It quickly

became apparent that Garrett had some severe breathing problems, so Life-flight took him from Waterloo to Iowa City. He is doing very well and there is nothing but optimism regarding his recovery. But it has been a difficult road and it will still take much time before Lucy and Garrett are at home resting in their parents' arms. During the early turbulent days, Sara gained strength from many sources—family, friends, the church, chaplains, doctors and nurses, a prayer shawl made with loving hands, etc. But an unexpected encouragement came from a pillow in the gift shop with an embroidered message: “Life is all about how you handle plan *B*.” Plan *B*. A job, friendship or marriage that didn't work out— deteriorating health or an economic crisis—most of us are living out plan *B*. And how we handle plan *B*, this is much of our life.

The two on the walk to Emmaus had certainly been confronted with plan *B*. They were devastated; they were scared. So what can we learn from their walk to Emmaus, from their learning to handle plan *B*? **First**, it's quickly evident that plan *B* isn't inferior to plan *A*. It often stands for God's *Best* plan. These two, along with all of Jesus' disciples, assumed the Messiah would conquer, not get crucified. They assumed something about Messiah that simply wasn't true. And that's part of our psychological problem as we try to deal with the plan *B*s in our lives—we assume some things about God that have no Scriptural basis. As a sixteen year old, I assumed that in answering God's call to ministry everything would go pretty smoothly as long as I did the “right” thing. (And if *you* believe that, I've got a bridge in San Francisco to sell you.) Things were often tough. From rejection in school to battles with doubt to long periods of time away from home to deep feelings of inadequacy to brokenness to fear to boredom—upon reflection my whole life has been plan *B*. But God has worked in and through both the triumphs and mistakes. Plan *B* has stood for God's *Best*.

The **second** thing we learn from this walk to Emmaus is that Jesus comes to us, but not always in recognizable ways. He is the Lord of the *new* creation, and as such, comes to us in new and creative ways. If we as believers will accept as a premise that God is always with us, then we can exert our energies on discerning *what* we're to do or *how* we're to respond and not waste our motion on asking “Where's God when I need him?” or “Why'd God let this happen?” The Lord is with us even if we have not recognized him! On at least three post-resurrection occurrences, Jesus was not initially recognized by those who knew him best. One thing this tells us is that Jesus comes to us in many forms, perhaps even wrapped in packages that at first offend or baffle us. But be sure, we are his new creations and he is with and, indeed, in us.

The **third** thing we learn from this walk is that he comes into our “homes” by invitation only. I make a distinction here: Jesus encounters us by *his* initiative, but he only lives with us by *our* invitation. He talked with the two as they walked, but then he would have passed on by until they invited him in. I see here a picture of Wesley’s prevenient and justifying grace. In prevenient grace we are awakened to God’s reality, drawn by God’s presence into a heightened awareness. But this alone does not mean that we are Christians. We still must invite Jesus to dwell in us, to be our Lord. This is justifying grace—*just as if we’d never sinned*. People who say, “I’ve been aware of God all my life,” have not necessarily invited him to rule in their hearts. Awareness *of* is not the same as being saved *by*. The Spirit after making us aware of his presence will bring us to a place of invitation whereby we surrender our will, the reigns of our lives to him. He initiates; we invite.

I love the next part of this passage: ³⁰*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.* ³¹*Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared...* It may have been sunset outside, but there was a dawning inside. And that dawning of revelation had to do with Jesus as the Bread of Life. Jesus will forever be connected to bread. Where was he born? Bethlehem. It means “house of bread.” His first temptation was resisting Satan’s request to “turn these stones to bread.” Jesus said to his disciples, “I am the bread of life.” When he fed the five thousand, he took the bread and “blessed it, and broke it and gave it.” As he reclined with his disciples at the Last Supper, he took the bread and “blessed it, and broke it and gave it” saying, “This is my body given for you.” And now in the village of Emmaus, though his physical body may have been in a different form, the familiar pattern of blessing, breaking and giving the bread ignited a dawning of the divine with these two disciples. It was he! He is risen!

In other Easter season sermons, I have tried to help people see the resurrected Christ by dealing with the arguments that help validate this extraordinary, history-altering claim. So rather than retracing that ground, let me keep it simple and practical: I think we often come to recognize the living Jesus in ways similar to his handling of the bread—through blessing, brokenness and sharing.

He takes the bread in his hand and blesses it. I think the greatest blessing in our lives is perhaps the most taken for granted or ignored: God’s presence. We get our word eulogy from the word blessing. God “says something good about us” by being with us. He blesses us, taking our lives in his hands he “breathes” new creation life into us. As the hymn says, “Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew...” Then he breaks the bread. We must be broken before we can be

given. Brokenness does not mean God crushes our personalities and turns us into spiritual androids. And brokenness before the Lord is more than the embarrassment of consequences from silly decisions, though this may help facilitate it. The brokenness of which I speak is a breaking of inner walls of selfishness, pride or fear that keeps the Holy Spirit from coming to us in fullness. Such inner dying and surrender brings reverence and a humble and teachable spirit. Psalm 34:18 – *The Lord is near the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* Psalm 51:17 – *A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* And Isaiah 66:2, speaking of God finding a “home” where his presence can rest says, *But to this one I will look, to the one who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word.* Brokenness before the Lord brings us to a place of abiding in God’s presence and being used by God’s Spirit to touch the lives of others. 2 Corinthians 1:4-5 says, “[God] comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.”

Jesus takes the bread of our lives and blesses it, breaks it and gives it. Immediately upon realizing who had been with them, the two Emmaus disciples got up and walked (and maybe ran) the seven miles back to Jerusalem. They had to tell someone! As William Barclay says, “The Christian message is never fully ours until we have shared it with someone else.”

Larae met one of our senior high youth at a store in town. He told her that Michael has been teaching the youth about sharing their faith with others. So, this young man went to a youth at school who has been bullied around and encouraged him. He told him that he is important, that God loves him and that he “can do all things through Christ who strengthens him.” He shared the table, the bread that had been given to him he shared with someone else.

I think we sometimes feel about witnessing like the one salesman my dad would tell about. He so hated his door-to-door job that he’d knock at the house and then say under his breath, “I hope no one’s home, I hope no one’s home.” You see, sharing the table isn’t about telling people deep theological truths that you can hardly get your head around. Sharing the table is telling what’s happened to you. The blind man Jesus healed was no scholar or public speaker. He had been healed on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders were challenging him. He shared the table; he spoke what he knew: “All I know is that I was blind and now I see.”

The walk to Emmaus is about accepting plan *B*, seeing Jesus in a new way and sharing that new *song* in our hearts with others. How can we keep from singing?