

## **Luke 24: 36-48**

**THERE IS A RITUAL MANY REGULARLY ENGAGE IN, MYSELF INCLUDED, WHICH MYSTIFIES ME A LITTLE BIT WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT. WHEN PEOPLE HAVE ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCES WATCHING A MOVIE, SEEING A GAME OR HEARING A CONCERT, THEY OFTEN LIKE TO READ ABOUT IT LATER. FOR EXAMPLE, I SAW GONE WITH THE WIND LAST SUNDAY AFTERNOON. I SAVORED ALL FOUR HOURS AND AFTER SEEING IT I SPENT MORE TIME LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE MOVIE. FOR OTHERS, IT'S FUN SOMEHOW TO GO BACK AND WATCH A GAME ON TV YOU SAW IN PERSON OR TO READ A BOX SCORE IN THE PAPER OF THE GAME YOU SAW. TO RECALL THE EVENT IS TO EXPERIENCE IT AGAIN AND PERHAPS MORE DEEPLY.**

**MEMORY SEALS AND OFTENTIMES CLARIFIES EXPERIENCE AND FREQUENTLY ALLOWS US TO SEE SIGNIFICANCE IN EXPERIENCES THAT WE DIDN'T GET AT THE FIRST TIME. I SUSPECT THAT A LOT OF WHAT IS IN THE BIBLE BECAME MORE CLEAR IN THE REMEMBERING AND RETELLING AND WRITING THAN IT WAS AT THE MOMENT. DID THE PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCED THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE IT AS A GESTURE OF GOD'S LOVE? DID MOSES FULLY GRASP THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BURNING BUSH AND THE PLAGUES AND THE ESCAPE THROUGH THE SEA AS IT WAS ACTUALLY HAPPENING?**

**PROFESSOR FRED CRADDOCK SAYS THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO KNOW AN EVENT: ANTICIPATING THE EVENT, EXPERIENCING THE EVENT AND REMEMBERING THE EVENT. IN ANTICIPATION WE ARE HINDERED BY NOT KNOWING WHAT EXACTLY IS GOING TO HAPPEN. YOU CAN EAGERLY ANTICIPATE THE GAME, CONCERT OR MOVIE BUT WHO KNOWS HOW GOOD OR AWFUL IT WILL BE. WHILE EXPERIENCING THE MOMENT WE ARE OFTEN HINDERED BY THE CLUTTER AND CONFUSION OF SO MUCH HAPPENING SO FAST. BUT IN REMEMBERING—RECOGNITION, REALIZATION AND UNDERSTANDING HAPPEN.**

**ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK AFTER THE DEATH, BY CRUCIFIXION, OF JESUS, TWO OF HIS FOLLOWERS BEGAN THE PROCESS OF SEALING THE EXPERIENCE THEY HAD WITH HIM BY REMEMBERING. THEY HAD DECIDED TO GO FOR A WALK. THEY HAD BEEN HIDING IN JERUSALEM FOLLOWING THE DEVASTATING EVENTS OF THE WEEK BEFORE: THE DEEPENING CRISIS AND CONFLICT, HIS ARREST AND TRIAL AND HUMILIATION AND DEATH. IT WAS FOR THEM A CRUSHING EXPERIENCE, AN EXPERIENCE OF PROFOUND LOSS. THEY HAD COME TO LOVE JESUS WHO SEEMED TO LOVE THE WORLD, AND THEM, AND EVERYTHING WAS FRESH AND NEW. AND NOW, AT 33, HE WAS DEAD. IN ADDITION TO THE LARGER CRISIS WHICH HIS DEATH PRESENTED, THERE WAS THE MATTER OF THEIR PERSONAL PAIN, THEIR GRIEF.**

**SO TWO OF THEM WENT FOR A WALK. THEY'RE REMEMBERING. THEY'RE DOING EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IN GRIEF. YOU NEED TO TALK. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT FAMILIES DO BEFORE AND AFTER THE FUNERAL OF A LOVED ONE. WHILE PUTTING TOGETHER A PICTURE COLLAGE FOR THE VISITATION OR VISITING AFTER THE FUNERAL, FAMILIES REMEMBER AND**

TALK ABOUT THEIR LOVED ONE AND TELL STORIES AND SHARE MEMORIES AND LAUGH AND CRY TOGETHER. THE SLOW BUT SURE PROCESS OF HEALING ACTUALLY STARTS AROUND THE DINING ROOM TABLE WHEN FAMILY AND FRIENDS GATHER AND SAY: “REMEMBER HOW SHE USED TO....REMEMBER THE TIME HE.....”

SO THAT IS WHAT THESE TWO ARE DOING, CLEOPAS AND AN UNNAMED COMPANION WALKING TOWARD EMMAUS. THERE IS A BIT OF MYSTERY HERE. WHY IS THE COMPANION UNNAMED AND WHO EXACTLY WAS CLEOPAS? FURTHERMORE, THE LOCATION OF EMMAUS HAS NEVER BEEN DETERMINED. THE NAME IS FAMILIAR: THERE IS THE INEVITABLE TOURIST SITE IN ISRAEL TODAY WHERE THOUSANDS OF PILGRIMS RECREATE THE WALK, HOWEVER THE EXACT LOCATION OF EMMAUS HAS LONG BEEN A TOPIC OF DEBATE.

SO IN THE MIDDLE OF THE VULNERABLE AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF, OUR TWO CHARACTERS ARE JOINED ON THE ROAD BY A THIRD PERSON. MORE MYSTERY. IT IS JESUS. THEY ARE FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES BUT THEY DON'T RECOGNIZE HIM. IS IT, THAT THEY ARE WALKING WEST INTO THE SETTING SUN AND THEY CAN'T MAKE OUT HIS FACE? OR IS IT, THAT IN THE MIDST OF THE CLUTTER AND CONFUSION OF THE PRESENT WE OFTEN MISS THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING, THUS NECESSITATING THE EXPERIENCE OF REMEMBERING?

IN ANY EVENT, JESUS JOINS THE CONVERSATION, ASKS THEM WHAT THEY WERE DISCUSSING. THEY TELL HIM THE EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS: JESUS, OUR HOPES THAT HE WAS ONE, HIS DEATH, THE RUMOR THAT HE WAS ALIVE, THE CLUTTER AND CONFUSION OF THE PRESENT. AND THEN HE, THE UNKNOWN COMPANION, LEADS THEM THROUGH THEIR OWN SCRIPTURE AND RELIGIOUS TRADITION, HELPS THEM PUT WHAT JUST HAPPENED IN THE CONTEXT OF THAT LARGER FRAMEWORK, THAT IS TO SAY, HELPS THEM REMEMBER.

THEY INVITE THE STRANGER...FOR THEY STILL DON'T RECOGNIZE HIM..TO STAY. AT TABLE HE TAKES BREAD AND BLESSES IT AND BREAKS IT AND THEY REMEMBER: “THEIR EYES OPEN AND THEY RECONGIZED HIM.” AND THEN THE EXPERIENCE ENDS. THE STRANGER DISAPPEARS. “WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US WHILE HE WAS TALKING TO US ON THE ROAD?”

AND INSTEAD OF STAYING THE NIGHT IN EMMAUS, WHERE THEY HAVE GONE TO DEAL WITH THEIR GRIEF, THAT VERY HOUR THEY RETURN TO JERUSALEM TO TELL THE STORY, “HOW HE HAD BEEN MADE KNOWN TO THEM IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD.” AN EXPERIENCE WITH THE RISEN LORD, A RATHER COMMON EXPERIENCE OF THE PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST, BECAME A SOURCE OF REBIRTH FOR THEM. TEARS BECAME LAUGHTER, GRIEF BECAME NEW ENERGY, NEW CREATIVITY, NEW COMMITMENT, NEW FAITH.

I LOVE THE WAY THE BIBLE CONTINUES TO ASSURE ME THAT FAITH IS A GIFT GIVEN BY GOD, SOMETIMES GIVEN BY GOD THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE: A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER, MENTOR, YOUTH PASTOR, A FRIEND, A SPOUSE. FAITH IS NOT SOMETHING YOU CAN FORCE OR COERCE ON OTHERS, OR ON YOURSELF, FOR THAT MATTER. FAITH IS A GIFT. IT WAS ONE OF THE MORE PROFOUND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE REFORMATION, NAMELY THAT OUR ABILITY TO BELIEVE IN GOD IS A GIFT OF GOD.

I LOVE THE WAY THE BIBLE ASSURES ME THAT THE GIFT OF FAITH IS GIVEN IN EXPERIENCES THAT ARE FAIRLY ORDINARY. THE EASTER EVENT, AFTER ALL, IS NOT PLANNED AND EXECUTED WITH MUCH FLAIR OR DRAMA. WHY DIDN'T THE RISEN CHRIST APPEAR TO PILATE AND THE CHIEF PRIEST? IT CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE CLEARED UP A LOT OF MISUNDERSTANDING. WHY NOT IN THE TEMPLE? THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN PERFECT. WHY ALL THE AMBIGUITY AND UNCERTAINTY? WHY NOT SOME PROOF FOR PEOPLE WHO MATTERED, PEOPLE WHO HELD SOME POWER AND CLOUT? WHY APPEAR TO THESE TWO ANONYMOUS CHARACTERS?

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO KNOW THAT REVELATION HAPPENS IN ORDINARY WAYS TO ORDINARY PEOPLE. MAYBE THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT. THE RISEN CHRIST COMES TO THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO FOLLOW, TRYING TO LOVE AND SERVE HIM, TRYING TO BE HIS PEOPLE, TRYING TO REMEMBER.

SOME BELIEVERS HAVE EXPERIENCED THE DIVINE THROUGH EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES, FULL OF DRAMA AND MYSTERY. OTHERS ASSUME THEIR SPIRITUALITY IS DEFICIENT BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT HAD A LUMINOUS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. MANY OF US WAIT FOR THE CLEAR VOICE IN THE NIGHT, THE THUNDER AND LIGHTENING, THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE, THE TONGUES OF FIRE, THE MOMENT OF CRYSTAL CLARITY, OUR NAME SPOKEN BY GOD WITH PRECISION. AT A TIME OF DEEP SPIRITUAL SEARCHING, ANNE LAMOTT WROTE, "WOULD IT BE ANY SKIN OFF GOD'S NOSE TO GIVE ME A STRAIGHT ANSWER, JUST ONCE?" AND I LOVE THE WAY THE BIBLE SUGGESTS THAT IT'S NOT ALWAYS LIKE THAT, NOT OFTEN LIKE THAT: THAT GOD COMES TO US IN WAYS THAT ARE EVERYDAY AND ORDINARY: AS COMMON AS A LATE AFTERNOON WALK AND BREAD BROKEN AND A MEAL SHARED.

COULD IT BE THE SACRED MOMENTS, THE MOMENTS OF MIRACLE, ARE OFTEN THE EVERYDAY MOMENTS, THE MOMENTS WHICH, IF WE DO NOT LOOK WITH MORE THAN OUR EYES OR LISTEN WITH MORE THAN OUR EARS REVEAL ONLY...A GARDENER, A STRANGER COMING DOWN THE ROAD BEHIND US, A MEAL LIKE ANY OTHER MEAL. BUT IF WE LOOK WITH OUR HEARTS, IF WE LISTEN WITH ALL OUR BEING..WHAT WE MAY SEE IS JESUS HIMSELF.

WE WATCH AND WAIT AND ANTICIPATE AND EXPECT THE DIVINE TO BREAK INTO OUR LIVES IN EXPERIENCES OF EXTRAORDINARY CLARITY, AND SOMETIMES THAT IS WHAT HAPPENS:

**CONVERSATIONS DURING A BIBLE STUDY BECOME MORE THAN SIMPLE WORDS, THEY BECOME A MEANS OF GRACE; BEAUTIFUL MUSIC BECOMES MORE THAN MUSIC AS IT PENETRATES OUR BEING, A GLORIOUS SUNSET PROCLAIMS THE GOODNESS OF CREATION AND CREATOR. THANK GOD FOR THOSE OCCASIONAL, EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES.**

**BUT THE BIBLE REMINDS US THAT JESUS CHRIST COMES TO US IN WAYS THAT ARE FAR MORE MODEST, IN THE DAILY ROUTINES, IN THE ACTIVITIES THAT OCCUPY US, IN THE PEOPLE WHOSE FACES PASS BY, IN MOMENTS OF KINDNESS AND COMPASSION, IN BREAD BROKEN AND MEALS SHARED.**

**WE ALL HAVE STORIES OF OUR LOSSES, OUR GRIEF, OUR ATTEMPTS TO LIVE THROUGH IT, TO RISE ABOVE IT, TO PUT LIFE BACK TOGETHER. YOU AND I HAVE EMMAUS STORIES OF REMEMBERING. AND THE PROMISE IS THAT JESUS CHRIST COMES TO US AND IN HIM GOD GIVES US THE GIFT OF FAITH, THE COMFORT AND STRENGTH OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE POWER TO LIVE WITH HOPE AND CONFIDENCE AND STRENGTH AND NEW LIFE, NEW ENERGY, NEW PASSION, NEW FAITH, NEW BEING.**

**IN THIS SEASON OF EASTER, WE CONTINUE TO BE REMINDED THAT ORDINARY MOMENTS BECOME SACRED MOMENTS, THAT MEMORY CLARIFIES AND SEALS EXPERIENCE OF GRACE, AND THAT GOD LIVES. GOD LIVES NOT IN A REMOTE CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE, NOT ON A THRONE INVISIBLE ABOVE THE CLOUDS, BUT IN THE WORLD, IN THE ORDINARY EXPERIENCES OF YOUR LIFE AND MINE: IN YOUR KITCHEN, IN YOUR OFFICE, IN YOUR YARD AND FIELD, IN OUR CHURCH.**

**GOD LIVES! EASTER IS ABOUT AN EMPTY TOMB. AND IT IS ABOUT THE COMPANION WHO COMES TO US ON THE DUSTY ROAD TO EMMAUS, COMES INTO OUR LIVES TO BE OUR GUEST, OUR HOST, OUR FRIEND, OUR COMPANION, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR. ALL PRAISE TO HIM. AMEN.**