

Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

"Thin Places" - Andy Wing, 5.3.09

One of my favorite places in the world is Asheville, NC. If you have ever been downtown on an average afternoon, perhaps you have also seen some strange sights – lots of people with dreadlocks, street performers covered in silver paint pretending to be statues, or other odd-looking folks who one might not see walking down most Main Streets in America. It is quite the mix! Asheville is also known as a very spiritual place. In fact, people talk about the spirituality of Asheville in an almost scientific way, because of its geography and geological characteristics. You don't have to be a scientist to see that there are people from all kinds of religions there: Buddhists, Baha'i, Muslim, and some you or I have never even heard of. And every major Christian denomination has a retreat center in the Asheville area

because it a relaxing, soothing climate, that gives people the space to reflect on their lives as Christians and gives them a time to rejuvenate. Many of you are familiar with the Presbyterian Conference center there known as Montreat. Presbyterians love Montreat.

There is a word for what Montreat is – a thin place. When I say it's a thin place, it's one of those places where God, the transcendent power the creator, comes into direct contact with the creation, the immanent the here and now. Where the felt barrier between us and God seems to melt away. And when God comes into contact with us in those places, things happen, amazing things happen. Montreat is one of those places where lives are changed and transformed because of the spirit of God. While many of us read about God, and study about God, we have to remember that God is not mainly there to be read or studied about but to be experienced.

Luke 24, today's story about the walk to Emmaus, is a story of transformation where these disciples experience God. When these disciples are discouraged, beaten, and hopeless after putting all of their hopes that Jesus was prophet who uproot the Roman Empire, and lift up the Jewish nation for all the world to see, Jesus comes to them. Jesus walks with them on the road after they have seen his crucifixion, suffering death on the cross. The road to Emmaus is a thin place for these disciples. Their hearts eagerly burn within them as they hear these words of God that tell them that God is right here and everything is going according to plan. They experience the power of God as God comes to them in their worries and hurt.

What is this transformation like?

A man went to visit an insane asylum where he spent much of the day with the residents. At the end of the day, he went up to one of the staff and said, "I don't see why these people are here. I have had some great conversations and passionate discussions with them. They can't possibly be mad." The worker said, (lecturing) "Oh they're mad alright. They are passionate. But all they are able to talk about is themselves. They're obsessed with self here. It's self morning, noon, and night. They are mad right enough."

Just like the people in the mental hospital, the disciples are talking only about themselves. They are not able to see anything other than their main concern, themselves; able only to talk about their own aches and pains. The disciples are only able to think, selfishly of their political and social hopes.

The disciples just haven't gotten it... This question of Who is Jesus? Because the disciples have seen Jesus do miracles, they think he will be an earthly king who will save Israel from the Roman Empire. Their eyes are closed to anything else. Their hearts are closed to any hope that comes through Jesus' suffering.

And hope is just what they need. Jesus appears to them as a stranger and tells them what he has told them over and over again. It is God's plan that the messiah must suffer. Jesus tells them the death of Jesus on the cross is not a cause for discouragement, but rather encouragement. Things are going just according to God's plan. Rather than just deliver Israel from Rome, God had a fundamentally different plan; to deliver a world (Jews, Romans, and all people) to deliver a world obsessed with itself from itself.

The disciples' hearts are burning within them. They don't know who this stranger is, but they want to spend more time with him. When the disciples reach their destination, Emmaus, they ask Jesus to come into their house and have supper with them. It is in this part of the story when it all makes sense to the disciples. When Jesus breaks bread, just like he had done all those times before, it clicks. They both recognize that it is Jesus, their Lord. They realized that their vision/ideal of Christ on earth had been far too shallow and had prevented them from discerning that their Lord had been with them the whole time.

We know that God is in the midst of us today. But at times, it is hard for us to discern how Christ is present with us. When we feel alone, discouraged, challenged, God can seem far away. Our attentions turn inward, to ourselves, like the disciples. We want to see Jesus, but we get focused on the worries of the world and lose sight of Christ's presence with us. We long for our Lord like the disciples on the road.

There are other times in our lives when we have felt particularly close to God. At these times our hearts go out to others in need. We think about how we can help others. At these times, we want to call and enjoy our friends and family, whoever we are close to. We want to share our happiness. The world looks beautiful. And we are grateful for what we have been given. These are times when we remember our Lord; when we feel free.

For some of us, there are certain people, certain places we can go, where we are especially close to God. These people and places have been called thin places. Thin because it feels like more than normal, God and God's creation are touching. Thin because like a thin sheet of paper where there is little or no barrier between your fingers, there little or no barrier or distraction between us and God.

There are other times in our lives that I guess could be called thick places where we wonder where our God is. (times of Death of a loved one, a loss, etc.)

The road to Emmaus when the two disciples were sharing their grief with each other would have been such a thick place where God seemed far away.

At times (and I am so grateful to God for this) thick places can become thin places. The story of the road to Emmaus is a thick place that becomes a thin place for the disciples. The disciples had the deepest kind of despair when they saw that Jesus' death meant that the nation of Israel would continue to be subject to the Roman rule. But they despaired no longer when they saw Jesus not only had power over death, but was supposed to die. And their fears were turned into leaps of joy. Their hearts were opened to the God who would do such an amazing thing.

I remember how my great grandmother's funeral became a thin place for our family. The loss of her was difficult. But, as we reflected, we were really excited about her being in presence of the Lord in a greater way. It was a thin place as we felt we were sharing in praise to God for what her life had also meant to our family. Our eyes were turned to God and my great-grandmother in God's presence. This was one thin place for me.

War also is a very thick place. The field of battle can harden a person. It is certainly a difficult place to discern the presence of the Lord. However, this thick place can also become a thin place. A friend of mine, who is a chaplain in the National Guard and served in Iraq, told me spiritual life in a war zone can be almost tangible. As soldiers are confronted so obviously with life and death, they want to listen and hear God. The war zone becomes a very, very thin place.

He writes, "I have been in tears during the services as Soldiers hug, cling, comfort and kiss each other. The amazing thing is that Iraqi Muslim and Christian Soldiers join with us both in loss and comfort. I wish people back home could see American soldiers from Georgia embracing Iraqi soldiers in shared grief." Such is the situation and why this is a thin place. "Soldiers", he says, "find great comfort in communion. The soldiers feel the very presence of God amidst the hard times. Soldiers discern the Body of Jesus in both the Communion itself and the love of the brothers in fellowship." Soldiers in uncertainty come together in community to find the comfort of God. There is something about the life of the soldier in Iraq right now that gets to the

heart of the Christian life. And I think this is that we need from each other. We need fellowship.

When the disciples need to discern his presence, Christ is revealed to them at the table in their home, in the midst of their community. Does God reveal himself to us when we're alone on the top of a mountain? Certainly! Those times of peace, the beauty of creation. They tell us a lot about the loving God that would make something like that. But why is it that when we see a beautiful sunset, we want to tell someone about it? Because God makes us for each other. And true to human nature, when the disciples recognize that Jesus has been in their presence the whole time, they get up from the table and run the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others that the Jesus is risen indeed!

The soldiers feel it strongly. Those of us who are in times of loss feel it strongly. We need to discern Christ's presence. We don't want to forget that Christ is always present with us. To become more aware of Christ's presence, we can do a number of things. Some, you can do alone: Pray..., it makes you notice life as you live it. The more you pray, the more you become aware of the things around you to be thankful and to pray for. Put in your favorite CD. You will discover all kinds of things you can do. But, I believe the most important way to discern the presence of Christ is to be in community with each other. We should gather together for meals. We should, like the soldiers be aware of the needs of each other.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he not only removed their fears, but he also showed them the primary way the disciples and all of the Christians after them would discern his presence, in the breaking of the bread.

Thin places are where WE go to seek God, but the thinness comes when God reaches past the INDIVIDUAL and selfish things that we hold onto and changes us, when we least expect it. We might be in a thick place because we are drowning in ourselves, or perhaps we seek out a thin place because of what we are looking for or what we want, but it is not about us approaching God, but God breaking through to us, despite our own thickness.

We don't have to go out on a search for God. We are blessed because God is here with us, around us, and in our hearts. Remember that it is in this community that God will open your eyes again and again. **Let us therefore seek to be in the Lord's presence in a thin place.**

#74 Road to Emmaus

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Prop: a poster of Jesus breaking bread with men at Emmaus

Summary: Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Jesus is with us in sad times.

Alternate introduction: Ask the children to make a happy or sad face any time they hear the words happy or glad or sad in the story. If you like, you can open with a mention of the story of Snow White and ask the children if they know the names of any of the dwarfs. Happy and Grumpy are the characters to get their attention about this sermon.

One day two friends were walking on the road to Emmaus. Something terrible happened three days before. Jesus had been hung on a cross and crucified. They were sad and upset about this. While they were talking about what happened Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. They didn't know that it was Jesus. They supposed it was just someone walking along the road. Jesus asked why they were so sad.

One of the two men, Cleopas, explained that they were sure Jesus was God's chosen person to save the children of Israel. He told about Jesus being crucified and how some women had been to the tomb that morning but his body wasn't there. The women had seen angels that said Jesus was alive!

Then Jesus began to explain that all through the writings of Moses and the prophets that these

things were written about Him before they ever happened. As they listened their hearts were happy to hear the good news that Jesus suffered to save His people. The very author of the Bible was explaining the scriptures to them and it made them glad. But remember that they didn't realize it was Jesus yet. They wanted to spend more time with this stranger but he acted as if he had to continue his journey.

They pleaded with him to stay for supper. As he sat down to eat he took bread, and blessed it, and broke, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. This was Easter and the risen Lord Jesus disappeared right in front of them!

Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Jesus had been killed and it was hard to understand why God would allow such a thing to happen. We may lose a dear friend in a car accident. Our father may lose his job. We might have a pet that we love very much that dies. A tornado, hurricane, or flood may damage or destroy our home. We don't understand what God's purpose is for us in that situation when it happens, but God is with us even in sad times when our hearts are breaking. Jesus walked right beside the two men on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is with us all the time no matter what happens. We can be happy about that!

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Is there a favorite food you associate with visiting your g-parents. milkshakes, mongleplats. the taste of roast beef and mashed potatoes. for the disciples, they recognize jesus in eating bread. jesus is within us and comforts us in our sadness.

One of the reasons we celebrate communion is because Jesus shared meals with his disciples This shows us that Jesus is concerned not only with our spiritual needs but with our physical needs; just like Nana want to take care of me and give me a good meal. It's one of the ways that Jesus loves us and loved his disciples.

bread and the significance of bread. he broke bread, fed 5000, tells us to ask for our daily bread. jesus shows his love for us by giving himself to us.