

The Road to Emmaus

Meeting ID: 812 698 997

Password: 183252

Where do you go when it all falls apart?

Cleopas, a Jesus follower we've never heard of, and his unnamed friend are leaving Jerusalem and going home.

Jerusalem is where their dreams died – they no longer have a reason to stay there. We know literally nothing about these two. They weren't in Jesus' inner circle of twelve. But we also know Jesus had a bigger following than just those twelve and the women who are named.

These two were close enough that Jesus had gotten their hopes up.

They'd been hearing about this promised Messiah their whole lives through the words of the ancient prophets. During their time with Jesus and the others, they'd come to believe Jesus was that Messiah.

We had hoped he would be the one to free Israel, they said.

But those hopes died on a cross. Beaten, bloody, gasping for breath, Jesus did not look anything like the Messiah they envisioned.

To be sure, the women told them the tomb was empty and about the angel and all that, but that only served to make them more confused and sad.

Resurrection wasn't real to them yet. As Jewish people in the time, they likely had a belief in a general resurrection at the end of this age – the great day of the Lord.

There was no place in their heads to grasp resurrection of one person before the end of this age. This rumor of resurrection just didn't make sense. In fact, it's in Luke's gospel that the disciples at first dismissed the women's report of the empty tomb as an idle tale.

So resurrection isn't real for them yet. Their hopes in a Messiah are dashed. Those who followed Jesus are frightened and grief stricken. These two decide it's time to go home.

Where else do you go when everything falls apart?

I'll have to confess that at times over the last few weeks, I've lived more in Good Friday than Easter. I feel a little like Cleopas and his friend. Resurrection doesn't always feel very real yet.

This story is especially a struggle for me this week. It's so connected to communion that it feels like we're missing out...even though to be honest, if this were a normal year and we were dealing with it on this day, we wouldn't have had communion anyway.

Honestly, I really have very little to complain about in all of this. There's not really anyone to complain about it to anyway – we're all in this thing.

But I am tired of it. I love Zoom for its ability to keep us connected, but it doesn't feel normal. I hope it never feels really normal.

I don't really need to list all the struggles related to the pandemic again.

And it's not like other life stuff has taken a break. Things like cancer and other illnesses, marital problems, addictions, mental illness, family conflict and so on are still around.

I have to admit the desire to escape...to hit the road... is there sometimes. But you can't really go anywhere. So my road to Emmaus is Netflix...and sometimes beer. Frankly, a little escape now and then is probably ok, as long as we don't overdo it.

The desire to leave...to just get away... can be strong in the midst of any kind of pain and disappointment.

So it's easy to see myself on the road to Emmaus. I can relate to the desire to get away from the pain and the chaos.

Many people can relate to the wish to escape from dashed hopes and disappointment – and that's true even in normal years.

But of course this encounter with Jesus changes everything for Cleopas and his friend. Jesus is revealed to them slowly...first, they had this strange sense...a burning in their hearts as Jesus revealed himself in the scriptures.

They didn't quite grasp it then...but when Jesus broke the bread, they got the whole picture. Suddenly resurrection became very real.

Excited, they get up from the table and head back to Jerusalem. They head back to the place where they'd experienced the pain and sorrow of Jesus' death. Only now, it seemed that place of pain and sorrow was being transformed to something new.

The place of the cross was being transformed into a place of new life.

But while they're on the road, Cleopas and the other disciple are living in both. They're living in pain and death...and they're living in resurrection.

They still don't exactly know what resurrection means. But what they choose to do is to move toward something which up until now seemed to be only pain.

And maybe that's where we get some traction. We too are living in both the pain, sorrow and death of life in this age...and in the joy and new life of the age to come. We are still living at the same time with the reality of death...and the promise of resurrection.

In fact it turns out that it's actually *in* the pain and death that resurrection is happening.

Right now, I can only grasp that by faith. I can hear these words in scripture and trust that since Jesus appeared to the disciples in the locked room and here on the road to Emmaus, he is also here with us.

I can remember past experiences when I have had a stronger sense of Jesus' presence. I can listen to those who are experiencing that now...so if you are, tell me.

But mostly what I can do is turn toward the struggle instead of away from it. I can trust that when I turn toward the struggle I am also turning toward resurrection, even if that doesn't really make sense yet.

I go back and forth...sometimes I escape...I turn toward Emmaus. Other times I turn toward Jerusalem...toward this crazy hard to grasp thing called resurrection.

So what does turning toward resurrection look like for you? Here are some things I've found – and I hope you'll share some of yours, either on the chat function of Zoom, or by phone or email.

One is perhaps the most obvious – I can notice the beauty as creation springs back to life. I got part of my garden planted and even though there's not much to do in it right now, it has started coming up. Going out to look at it is a turn toward new life.

In fact just going outside and looking for signs of new life in creation can almost be like having Jesus open the scriptures to me.

Exercise has for me been a turn toward new life. As many of you know, I do triathlons. I'm not sure how many races I'll actually get to do this year – my big one is at the end of August, so I'm still hopeful for that. But either way, triathlon training is how I stay healthy, whether a race happens or not.

Zoom and Facetime and Skype aren't exactly completely satisfying as a way to connect, but we've connected with friends and family outside work meetings and that is a turn toward new life.

And I can make the turn toward Jerusalem... I can make the turn toward both pain and sorrow...AND...resurrection.

I do that when I think about and respond to the needs of others. I can make decisions with the protection of others in mind. I can donate money and order takeout and tip generously. I can make phone calls.

I can write a letter to my dad...he's in rehab at Tabitha and misses getting the mail. Normally, that seems to be a highpoint of his day, and even though he doesn't get much that's all that exciting, he misses it.

All of those things are a turn toward resurrection. How are you turning toward Jerusalem? How are you turning towards both the struggle and towards new life?

We never really know exactly what the future holds...things seem more uncertain now than usual, but really it's always true.

Each moment we live in this current age, we will always be living in both the reality of death and the promise of resurrection. And frankly, there are times when the reality of death simply weighs more heavily on us than others.

The reality of resurrection never negates the pain of death and suffering. We have to give them their due. Glossing over pain and suffering helps no one.

But sometimes, we can make the choice to turn back to Jerusalem ...we can turn toward the place of pain, suffering and death...and in doing so we learn that it is also the place of resurrection.

