

April 8, 2018
Luke 24:13-18, 28-32
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“Do I Know You?”

Good morning! I bet you’re thinking this would be a good time for a joke, to kind of get the whole Holy Humor thing fired up for what is otherwise going to be 15 or 20 minutes of a tedium, or not long enough for a decent nap. Well, I hate to disappoint you, but preaching the gospel is serious business, and your job is to hang on my every thoroughly documented and carefully crafted word. I’m not about to cheapen this theological responsibility by telling a joke. I would like to show you a silly YouTube video, though.

This illustrates the human tendency -- as you will see, a very early tendency -- to be frightened and then to laugh when ever that frightening thing stops. Take a look at this clip of fright and relief. [YouTube Baby laughing]

So this is pretty much the state that the disciples are in the days following the resurrection. Sort of a “Good news/bad news” scenario. It was certainly a time of emotional ups and downs. I’m going to summarize the story for you, and I’m going to ask you to participate by responding to each sentence with Boo. . . if it’s bad news, and Yeah! If it’s good news. I hope you can tell the difference. Let’s do a test run: The sermon is going to be extra-long today Boo . . . because of a special fellowship time afterward Yeah! But the Fellowship Team didn’t buy any food Boo . . . because Betty Yoder made it all Yeah! I just made that up Boo. . . You’ll have to come back next week. Yeah!

Here is our interactive story: Jesus has been working miracles and healing people. Yeah! The Pharisees don’t think he should heal people on the Sabbath. Boo . . . Jesus went to visit his best friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Yeah! Lazarus got sick and died before

Jesus could get there Boo . . . So Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead! Yeah! And now the Pharisees are really mad. Boo . . . Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and the people shouted Hosanna! Yeah! Now the Pharisees are determined to have Jesus put to death Boo . . . But not until Jesus has a last meal with his disciples Yeah! One of whom will betray him Boo . . . Jesus' disciples still have a chance to pray with him Yeah! But they all fall asleep. Boo . . . Jesus was arrested, but the Roman governor knew Jesus was innocent Yeah! And he condemned Jesus to death anyway Boo . . . A Roman centurion at the cross recognized Jesus as God's Son Yeah! Just as Jesus took his last breath. Boo . . . (careful now) Jesus was laid in a tomb that was sealed with a large stone. Boo . . . On the third day the women went to prepare his body with spices Boo . . . They thought that someone had stolen the body Boo . . . because the tomb was empty! Yeah! Christ had risen from the dead! Yeah! The disciples were so excited they told everyone Yeah! But no one believed them Boo . . . Two disciples met a very well-informed stranger on the road the Emmaus Yeah! who did not know anything about what had happened in Jerusalem with Jesus Boo . . . But he explained to the disciples all about Moses and the prophets Yeah! When he broke bread for the evening meal with him, they realized that it was Jesus who had been walking with them Yeah! And then he disappeared. Boo . . . Thank you for your help, that's the end of the interactive portion of the sermon. (Yeah? Boo?)

I think there's definitely some comedic material, as well a serious problem on the road to Emmaus. Have you figured out what the problem is? How do the disciples *not* recognize Jesus? Now, to be clear, these aren't the apostles, the 12 -- eleven now, without Judas -- men who have spent the last three years traveling with Jesus. But still, Cleopas and WhatshisName seem to think they were pretty tight with Jesus: they had high hopes about him being the One to redeem Israel, and they were part of the first group of followers to hear from the women who were at the tomb; they call them "the women in *our* group." It certainly sounds like they want to believe -- Cleopas and WhatshisName actually go back to the tomb to check it out for themselves, and it was just like women said, but they didn't see Jesus for themselves. So as much as they would like it to be real, they just can't say for sure. What does this guy on the road think?

Well, this guy certainly has a lot to say, and he doesn't pull any punches. He begins by saying (I'm paraphrasing here) "You idiots! Why is this so hard? Why can't you simply believe what the prophets said?" And because the prophets said a LOT, and it is seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, this stranger spends the rest of the trip interpreting everything that has been written about the Messiah in the Law and the prophets. You'd think that maybe Cleopas and WhathisName would have an inkling of who it is who is speaking to them. His face, his voice, the fact that he knows the scriptures forward and backward -- were there wounds in the man's hands or his feet, I wonder? Cleopas and WhatshisName don't seem to wonder, they just keep walking and soaking it in.

They do have enough sense, though, to ask this very well-informed stranger to stay with them for the night. The stranger agrees. It is supper time, so they go into the hotel, motel, guesthouse, whatever it is, and sit down for dinner. And the stranger is at the table with them and takes the bread and blesses it and breaks it. Now, where have they seen that before? Oh my God (I mean that literally) it's Jesus! He is risen, just as he said! Yeah! And then Jesus disappears. Boo. . . And Cleopas and WhatshisName do what any sensible disciples would do; they get up and run to Jerusalem, back the seven miles they had just walked. In the dark.

The part of the story where Jesus explains the scriptures is very interesting, but since I spend about 50 Sundays a year explaining the scriptures, today I'd like to focus on Jesus suddenly being recognized and then disappearing, because that is really cool. It reminds me of another story. Maybe you know it, too. Let me see if I can give you a clue. I know don't recognize me now, because I'm wearing glasses and I changed my hair. There's not a trace of that amazing pastor who leaves the office on Friday afternoon faster than a speeding locomotive, and who is able to leap difficult biblical texts in a single bound. No, I'm just a mild-mannered church lady who happens to be standing behind this pulpit during the sermon. Just the worship leader, trying to figure out what comes next, don't pay any attention to me.

OK, I know you want to see a real super hero transformation, so let's do it. I really wanted it to be Christopher Reeve, but this is a clip from

the TV series Smallville. A few comments: during this clip the Clark Kent character will say, "Tell the minister I may be a few minutes late," which is a line I get a lot, but not usually from superheroes. This segment includes the theme music written for the big screen by John Williams, and if hearing the Superman theme makes you think of singing grace, then you have been spending too much time at Camp Mack. If you don't know what I'm talking about, see Emily Birr or Chris Wilson. Roll the clip [YouTube Clark Kent to Superman]

The disciples who were on the road to Emmaus see the stranger they had been walking with for several hours transformed into their risen Lord. Or, more accurately, it was the disciples who had their perception transformed. They recognized in the ordinary and not really superhuman act of breaking bread, that they were in the presence of someone very, very special, and before they could capture or hold that presence, Jesus disappeared. Clark Kent and Superman are the same person, it is our understanding which changes. Jesus knows who we are, the question is, will we know Jesus when we encounter him -- especially in the course of our everyday activities. Do we believe that the resurrected Christ is still among us, sharing bread, giving encouragement, revealing the meaning of the scriptures, noting that we are stubborn idiots on occasion? Maybe an encounter with someone we don't know will give us insight we never expected, and when that happens, we can't help but run back the way we came to tell others what happened. We want to pass it on.

If you don't know this Kurt Kaiser song that we're going to sing at the end of the service, you have missed out on one of the great clichés of summer church camp. It's not Kurt Kaiser's fault he wrote a song which was so accessible that it only took a spark before it spread like wildfire and got shared around campfires everywhere, and soon all those around had heard it over and over and over. But that's how it is with God's love, we need to experience it over and over and over until we get it for ourselves. Blessings for this Holy Humor Sunday: Jesus' witness among us is no laughing matter.