

Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?

[Luke 24:32](#)

Preparing this sermon brought back memories of my days at Austin Seminary. One of the more memorable assignments I had come to mind as I pondered today's gospel reading. The task was to choose a story from scripture that could serve as a model for how I would approach ministry. My seminary professor shared her story with us first. Her model was based on the story of Moses and the burning bush ([Exodus 3](#)). When my professor would minister to someone, especially someone going through a challenging time, She would think about it through this lens. She would see their challenging time as a burning bush, invite them to turn aside, take off their shoes, recognize it as holy ground, and listen for what God might be saying to them.

I like that one. It is a good model for ministry. But I chose today's gospel reading – the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus ([Luke 24:13-35](#)) – as my personal model for ministry and Christian living. Again your hearing a sermon because I had to hear this first. I needed this reminder to help me with my ministry today. And with that in mind, I thought I would walk us through this gospel reading today and share with you what I think this story can teach us about ministry and the Christian life.

What things?

The story begins with two disciples on their way back home to Emmaus. So put yourself on the road to Emmaus. We have just left Jerusalem and are walking back home. We are sad and confused. Sad because our hope died on a cross and was buried in a tomb. Confused, though, because we have heard reports that the tomb was found empty by the women who went there, and that there were angels telling them that Jesus was alive. Although no one had yet seen him. So, you can imagine the conversation as they walked back home that day.

And while they were talking about all these things, Jesus himself joined them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And what did Jesus do when he joined them on their journey? First, he listened to them. He asked them a simple, open-ended question, and then he listened to their answer.

“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” He asked. And of course, Jesus knew what they were discussing. But he still wanted to listen to them. Jesus wants to know what was happening with all of us. In our own words. And so, in this story, Cleopas and his companion share what is on their hearts. Standing still, looking sad, they share their story.

And doesn't this teach us a lot about ministry and the Christian life? It reminds us, first, that the risen Jesus is walking with us through this life, even when we don't recognize him. But it also teaches us how to share our faith with others. Because we can learn from Jesus. What better teacher?

Jesus teaches us that it all starts simply by joining someone on their journey: Walking with them. Talking to them. Listening to them. It starts there. This might mean opening ourselves to someone else's pain. That's part of being with another person and caring for them in the way Jesus teaches. Sometimes we want to skip this step. But Jesus shows us in this story how important this step is. To listen to someone, share their pain and their grief. To be present to them. This is the first step to ministering to another person. Before we ever share our faith, we listen. As Jesus did.

Beginning with Moses ...

After Jesus listened to Cleopas and his companion, he then opened his Bible. Not literally, but he began to interpret what the Bible had to say about his death and resurrection. He opened scripture to them, and their hearts burned. Their hearts burned with a fierce joy as Jesus did this. Why? Because he helped them to see their story wrapped up in God's story. And he helped them to understand that the cross was necessary. That everything Jesus did in his life and in his suffering was done out of love for us. And that was all necessary to bring forgiveness, healing and hope to our sad, broken and sin-filled world.

And isn't part of our vocation as Christians to do the same? To help others to see their story wrapped up in God's story. To see our own story wrapped up in God's story. Whether it is literally using scripture or not, we can help others to see their life through the lens of God's grace and mercy. We can help them

to better understand their place and purpose in this world, by helping them to see that they walk through this world with Jesus, who died for them, and is with them now. What a privilege it is to do this.

Now, it is also important to notice that Jesus does not just offer these two disciples a pat on the back and a gesture of love. He also rebukes them for their lack of faith. “*How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe,*” he says to them.

Sometimes, in other words, when we look at our life through the lens of eternity, we don't like what we see. We wandered off the path. Or a friend or family member has wandered off the path. Sometimes we need to hear from our Lord or from a friend, a word of rebuke. Reminding us how foolish we are, and how slow of heart we can be to believe. And sometimes we might need to say that to another. (After we have addressed the splinter in our own eye, of course.) But there are times when we are called not just to be cheerleaders, but prophets. Speaking a necessary word from above.

Stay with us ...

Ok. So, looking at what this story teaches us about ministry and the Christian life, we have seen how Jesus joins us on our journey, and invites us to open our hearts to him. We have seen how this can open us to sadness, but that sadness in God's presence is always mingled with joy. We have seen how God's word can help us to better understand how God is at work in our life. Sometimes it will comfort us, and sometimes it will challenge us.

So, what is next? Well, Cleopas and his companion are nearing their home in Emmaus. Jesus walked ahead, as if he were going on. They still don't know it is Jesus, but they urge him strongly, saying, "*Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.*"

So, think about that: Jesus doesn't invite himself into their home. He waits for an invitation. He teaches us to do that. And he does that for us. Jesus joins us on the journey without our asking, that's true. But at some point, and maybe at a lot of points, he waits to be invited in. "*Listen, I stand at the door, knocking,*" Jesus says in Revelation. "*If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*" Jesus comes to the doors of our hearts knocking, but he waits to be let in. He never forces his way in. I don't know if any of you have seen the movie "Bruce Almighty". This is a Jim Curry movie where he acquires divine powers. One line resonates with me. He said, "God doesn't force someone to love him." Just so, Jesus waits to be invited in. And this, too, is a powerful image for the Christian life. And a reminder to us of how we should approach walking with others. Not pushing our faith on anyone but always being ready when the invitation presents itself. We need to be prepared as it says in 1Peter 3:15 "*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*" Ouch! That hit me right in my stomach. Am I, we

prepared to give the reason for the hope that we have?

He took bread ...

Now, once the disciples in Emmaus do invite Jesus in, they break bread together. And this simple meal becomes holy. Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. And then, their eyes are opened, and they recognize him. In the breaking of the bread. Worship, and particularly the Service of Holy Communion, has been described as the summit of the Christian life. It is arguably the most important thing that we as Christians do. We worship the living God. It is amazing, when you read the Old Testament, to see how much of it is dedicated to proper worship, and to the building of the Temple, or the restoring of the Temple. In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is the Temple; and that proper worship is all about gathering in Jesus' name to do what we are doing today: To confess our sins, hear God's Word, pray for our world, and then to bless and break the bread, and share the body of Christ in remembrance of him. And there really is nothing more important than this. It may not always feel that way. But we trust that it is true. And we can pray that our eyes will be opened when we worship Jesus; and that we, like those disciples in Emmaus, will have Jesus made known to us in the breaking of the bread.

That same hour they got up ...

But the story doesn't quite end there. When their eyes are opened, and they recognize Jesus, he

immediately vanishes from their sight. So, what does this teach us about ministry and the Christian life? It teaches us about the importance of what we do after we worship Jesus. After we pray, and hear God's word, or share the Lord's Supper; we go to serve our Lord; we go to love, serve and proclaim God's grace to all. It's printed at the top of our bulletin, "***Enter to worship – leave to serve.***"

As soon as those disciples realized that they had been with Jesus, they got up and rushed back to Jerusalem to share the news. Think about that: A dangerous seven-mile journey, in the evening, with the day almost over. But they went, eagerly, to share their joy. And so should we. After recognizing Jesus in our midst, we should always go with a sense of urgency – to share our faith, and to love our neighbor, and to do everything that Jesus has commanded us to do. After our eyes have been opened to see our risen Lord, how can we do any less?

Closing

There are many stories in scripture that can serve as models for us, of how to approach our lives as disciples. This story, of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, just happens to be my favorite. A story that teaches us how to join others in their journey. The importance of listening to them, especially as they share their pain and doubt. The reminder to help them see their story caught up in God's story, and in the story of the death and resurrection of God's son. The significance of breaking bread with one another, of celebrating communion and having

our eyes opened to the presence of Christ among us. And the urgent call to go and share our faith and our joy with the world. For the Lord has risen indeed and is walking with us on our journey through life.

Prayer

May our eyes be opened, so that we can recognize Jesus in our midst. May our hearts burn with joy as we see our story wrapped up in his. And may we always be eager to share the joy of his resurrection and presence among us. To the glory of God.
Amen.