

Between Two Worlds:  
From Easter to Eternity  
Luke 24:13-35  
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5-1-11

#### Luke 24:13-35 (NKJV)

The final four is over. The NCAA banner is hanging proudly at the University of Connecticut. The band has stopped playing, the crowds are gone and it's back to school, into the office, life as usual.

The Academy Awards have been presented, the post-award parties are over and everyone's gone home.

Hardly anyone remembers the awards from a year ago or last year's World Series or January's Super Bowl.

The promotion or a wedding, a birth, a prom or a graduation has come and gone, and life is back to routine.

Great spiritual experiences, discoveries, ecstatic moments, even miracles, have happened, but that was last week or last year or many years ago.

And, we muddle through ups and downs of everyday life, here and now, trying to live a life of faith.

#### I. Fanfare

We had an inspiring Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday that have come and gone. No more fanfares this week, no beautiful communion table decoration.

It seems all of the excitement is gone; even last Sunday's crowds are gone. And we sit back and wonder, now what?

#### Luke 24:13-35 (NKJV)

13: Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.

14: And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15: So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.

16: But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

17: And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"

Two disciples are heading down from Jerusalem to Emmaus to their home late Easter afternoon. Easter has happened.

They have heard the report that their friend and spiritual leader who was brutally executed on Friday was alive!

This was astounding, perplexing, and exciting news that left them uncertain, cautious, and confused. Remarkable news, but it wasn't what they had expected.

It had not transformed all of the world: Jerusalem was still in the hands of Rome and the Risen Jesus was nowhere to be found.

#### II. Failure

So, back on the road, back home, back to the mundane and to business as usual, with dashed hopes, unfulfilled dreams, squelched enthusiasm, a disappointing and questionable future. An ending with no beginning in site. Do you ever feel that way?

Easter has happened, you have heard God's voice, you have celebrated the Resurrection, and you believed. You felt transformed, born anew. You were here last Sunday and went away feeling good: God had met you here.

#### III. Forgotten

"Christ is risen," we said, "He is risen indeed." But Monday came, or, at least by Friday afternoon, life was pretty much the same.

We have tried to be faithful, and we go on trying to live by faith, but yet in the ordinary struggles of life, it is somehow difficult.

We feel caught between two worlds, caught between the way life is and the way it ought to be, caught between the bookends of Easter and eternity.

We are living our lives in transition from one experience of life to another, constantly moving from where we have been to where we are going.

We are on a journey, leaving the past behind, making a transition to the future, and we find ourselves somewhere in between.

#### IV. Fear

What spiritual valley are you in today? What spiritual mountaintop experience have you left behind? What transition are you in?

Perhaps it is a predictable transition – going through the stages of life: retirement, aging, the death of a loved one.

And then there are the unpredictable changes that come along – changes in our employment; our financial ups and downs and sideways; a divorce, a move, the loss of a dream, or the ending of a project.  
How we manage our transitions, how we deal with the spiritual valleys makes a huge difference in our lives.

Psychologist William Bridges says that there are three stages of transition. There are endings and beginnings and a neutral zone in between.

All transitions involve losses. Loss and separation is hard, and we tend to avoid it, but we can't hang on, we can't live in the future hanging on to the past.

Bridges writes, "New growth cannot take root on grounds still covered by the old. Every transition is an ending that prepares for new growth and new activities."

Jesus says in John 12:24, "Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it cannot produce fruit."

You see folks here we sit the Sunday after Easter sitting between two worlds - Easter and eternity! I ask you this morning what are you doing for eternity?

I have shared before that there is no retirement in the Christian walk. Did you hear that? No retirement in the Christian walk!

I pray that if God lets me live long enough that I will be faithfully serving as some of you wonderful seniors.

You see I believe we are in a neutral zone right now. Some of you are just waiting to see what is going to happen.

You can disagree with me all you want but I believe that while I have been preaching since last July that we all need to find our place of service – I don't think that we should look always to our mothers of young children to be working in the preschool each week.

You say, are you crazy? Those are their kids! That's right and you know what? We have mothers right here with 2, 3, 4, or 5 kids in the preschool or children's area. They are with those precious children all day 7 days a week. Those moms need not only a physical break, but also a spiritual break too.

#### V. Function

Now I'm not the kind of guy who likes to strong arm or guilt people into ministry. You must have a tugging and calling to do a work or else you will be unhappy and do a poor job at it.

However, church, it is past time for us to be in the neutral zone. Let's get going and move forward!

Romans 12:6 We are commanded to use our gifts.

If you are part of this body – you must serve. It is not a request – it is a command!

Is there any part of your physical body that you don't use? No! You use every finger, toe, and muscle so that you can function as a whole.

That is how the church body is. I don't care if you're a pinky finger – but if you are – then move it and use it!

Folks, we have needs in EVERY area of our church. There is a place to serve. They are so many places to serve that there has to be one or more areas that you can be passionate about working in.

These are not empty requests. It IS time to move forward for eternity. We need to stop living in the past. We need to get out of the neutral zone. We need help for ministry in the areas of:

1. Preschool Children – come on step up and give these moms a break!
2. Children’s Division
3. One that is a big concern on my heart right now is our youth!
4. Singles ministry
5. Young married
6. Visitation
7. Our worship team!

You see, before leaving from endings to beginnings, we pass through the wilderness of our neutral zones. This is often a time of confusion and considerable uncertainty.

We are up in the air, out in the dark, the honeymoon is over. And sometimes in the comfortableness of this neutral zone – the wondering through the wilderness – we want to go back. We want to go back to Egypt, to the Mount of Transfiguration, or to some place of security, comfort or calm. “The good old days.”

#### VI. Faith

We need faith because we can’t, nor should we, for God is doing a new thing and we need to journey on by faith through the neutral zone. We need to love and embrace the present with all the questions and all the struggles and find our way through.

#### VII. Fulfillment

So, what transition are you in this morning? At work, at home, with God – what valley are you traveling through with the joy of Easter behind us, and eternity and the Kingdom of God and your spiritual fulfillment seemingly a long way off?

In what way do you identify with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road who said, “Our own hope had been that he was the one to redeem Israel and set us free!” Where is He?

On the road, coming off a high, on a journey through the neutral zone, a stranger joins us.

17: And He said to them, “What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?”

18: Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?”

19: And He said to them, “What things?”

So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

20: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.

21: But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.

22: Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.

23: When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.

24: And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.”

25: Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26: Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”

27: And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Cleopas (“Cleo”) and another disciple have just entered their neutral zone. The ending has happened, the ecstasy of Easter is over, and the new beginning that they had placed all of their hopes in has not yet come.

So, walking away quietly from Jerusalem, they are joined unobtrusively, gently, by a third who walks with them and listens. He has a word with them and joins them for dinner.

Folks, the risen Lord comes to join us on the journey through the mundane, the ordinary, the perplexing places of our lives. He meets us sometimes obviously, powerfully, wonderfully, but perhaps most often subtly, gently, as a stranger or friend.

Jesus comes to us in the in-between, bringing his loving, caring, and encouraging presence. Perhaps he comes through the life of another Christian brother or sister.

Perhaps he comes at a hospital bedside or over a cup of coffee in the break room. In a restaurant in the middle of the week – and that encounter Jesus fulfills his promise to us, “Lo, I am with you always, I will not leave you alone, I will send another.”

The stranger who joins Cleopas and the other disciple, and who joins us on our journey, comes as the one who listens to their story and to our story. We have a persistent need to have someone who will listen, listen, listen – who will understand us from our frame of reference and from God’s frame of reference.

The Lord never tunes us out; he never walks away. He pays attention to us. And, whenever someone comes alongside you to listen to you, you have evidence of the continuing reality of the resurrection.

Then the stranger opens up the scripture.

27: And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

#### The Disciples’ Eyes Opened

28: Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.

29: But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.

30: Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

31: Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

32: And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”

33: So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,

34: saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

35: And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

In the midst of their confusion and their uncertainty, the Word of God is offered to shed new light, to bring insight and understanding of the awareness of God and God’s understanding of life.

I am amazed at how often in my transitions, in my in-betweens, in my valleys, God will give me a word of Scripture that day for that particular situation.

And notice that the word of God comes to the disciples not in private; rather Jesus forms a small community to discuss and explore the Scripture together.

So the next thing Jesus does for the disciples on the Emmaus Road and that he does for us on our Emmaus Road, is to create for us a community.

In the breaking of the bread, their eyes were opened. The breaking of bread has a reference not only to the experience of communion, but also to the experience of fellowship. We say to each other when we want fellowship, “Let’s break bread.”

Community is formed. Yes, Jesus does meet us in private, and in our own personal spiritual retreats.

But more often he meets us in the context of the people of faith Christ meets us here in the sanctuary of our church. He also meets us in our Sunday School classes, in small group Bible studies. He meets with our children and student ministry.

Then, he vanishes. Oh, he is still with us – but just as Jesus said to all of the disciples, “It is good for you that I go away, for faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

God has provided for us a people, a book and a Person: the listening, loving, and empowering continuous Presence.

Easter, dear folks, has happened, and it continues to happen all the way through eternity.

What then is our response? As we come down off our highs and as we live down in the valleys, as we walk the road to Emmaus and the streets of Snellville, the Risen Christ is here!

We need to recognize that God is not interested in lifting us out of here until we finally take our place in his presence in eternity.

Yet, he does promise, always, to be with us in the midst, giving us the Scriptures, giving us a community of people to share this journey with us, giving us himself – and then he sends us on a mission. God is calling you and asking you – what is your mission?

Dear friends, on this week after Easter, it is my invitation to you, to welcome transition, to let the Risen Christ come, and to let our hearts burn within as we welcome his presence.

This walk we have is an incomparable and remarkable journey, full of new life in every way.

“Therefore,” Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; all things have passed away, and behold, everything with him becomes new.” Happy Easter, everyday!