

Picture a road leading to the village of Emmaus... A tomb along the path... Two disciples walking on the road with a stranger... And finally the word “Sorrow” above the three men.

Most of the time we contrast the two concepts of darkness and light, blindness and sight. The dynamic of those two concepts suggests at least two fundamental themes. First, it can signify the unveiling of God’s divine plan. God’s intervention in the darkness of this world through Jesus his Son marks in an unprecedented way the truth that God is now with us, and the kingdom of redemptive love and peace is already here. But second, it invites us to explore how much we see. Are we walking in the darkness or have we come into the light where we see things clearly and most importantly see our Lord present in this world?

Those of us who live around the intersection of Grant Street and Herbst Road in Kennedy Township were able to experience that first-hand two weeks ago when because of the high winds a large spruce tree fell onto the power lines and left us in the dark for 50 hours. Is there any better way to realize the sharp contrast between darkness and light than relying on a flashlight or your cell phone to keep from stumbling and falling as you move around your own home? Jesus compared his kingdom to a city on a hill at night, or like a lamp on a stand. The Risen Jesus is here! He ascended to the right hand of the Father, but he is in this world today. In John 12:46 Jesus says, *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Throughout this season of Lent I invite all of you to ask and answer the following questions: Where do we see him? And the follow-up question is: How much of his kingdom presence do we recognize in our midst?

These two questions will be at work as we join the Emmaus travelers on their pilgrimage of discovery in the 2019 season of Lent which rolls out before us like a road on which we are all traveling. Like those two disciples, we experience similar thoughts and emotions, even as we live after the fact of the Resurrection of our Lord. This year each of the six worship services that precede Easter Sunday are themed after a certain aspect of the Emmaus Road story found in Luke 24. The flow of this six week series, I am praying, will encourage us in worship to travel with the Risen Jesus in our own life’s experiences to his cross, on to the empty grave, and then on to the glorious celebration of Resurrected life as we walk our daily paths.

In today’s message, I want to whet your appetite for a spiritual journey that will invite us all to explore what Jesus has done personally and the work he has accomplished that this season of the year calls us to remember, and how this season has the potential to open our hearts and lives to new vistas of experience and meaning.

Any Star Trek fan in the congregation will remember the opening monologue of the original show: “Space . . . the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before” (Here it is for all you Trekkies and non-Trekkies). Like the crew of the Enterprise, so it was

for the two disciples who left Jerusalem on Easter Sunday evening, walking in the direction of Emmaus. Unknowingly they were embarking on a journey into unexplored and uncharted territory—historically and spiritually.

The two disciples begin their journey from Jerusalem perplexed, disappointed, discouraged, and, most of all, **sorrowful**. They're perplexed that such a good and innocent man was suddenly and brutally murdered, disappointed that the dream of messianic peace had not materialized, discouraged by the sudden end of their journey as students of their wise teacher, and grieved by the tragic loss of their faithful friend. But that's not all.

Rumors had been started by some women who had gone to the tomb of Jesus that very morning. They said that the tomb had been opened, the body was gone, and angels told them that Jesus was alive. It was all too much to process. The two of them simply had to get out of town. As they walk they try to make sense of it all.

Most of us sitting here this morning have experienced these same realities of human life and relationships.

- Dreams and plans we have for our families, for our careers, and for our future fall through because of circumstances outside our control, causing deep disappointment.
- Injury, illness, or declining health discourage us.
- Broken marriages or wayward children cause confusion and heartache.
- Injustices we encounter in our personal or professional lives frustrate us.

I visited a woman in our congregation this week on the one-year anniversary of her husband's death and, as I suspected, it was a terribly difficult day for her. While untimely deaths can cause confusion and anger, the death of any loved one can bring an indescribable sense of loss. But in the midst of these dark realities we can experience an inexplicable sense of light and hope.

Luke's narrative reminds us that we do not travel through these life experiences alone. We have a number of very helpful companions. **First**, the two disciples listen to the Word and allow it to inform their thoughts. **Second**, as the events of the past three days are placed in the context of sacred history, their historical and spiritual significance begins to emerge. **Third**, the two do not travel alone as isolated or even solitary individuals; they are walking together in relational and conversational community. **Most importantly**, the two travelers have Jesus. They—and often we—may not always recognize him in our midst, but he is nonetheless present, as he has promised. These four guides will accompany us over the next six weeks as we explore our own faith through the unfolding narrative of the Emmaus journey. There is perhaps no other passage in the New Testament that speaks to the transformative power of Jesus Christ in the lives of his followers—to move us from confusion to brilliant insight.

An article titled, “The Bad News of Just Being Yourself” (*Mockingbird*, September 4, 2018) by Matt Schneider is a good example of the confusion we often find ourselves in. Schneider says that “being yourself” is the heart of almost every commencement address. “Follow your passions. Just be yourself. Look inside your heart and you’ll find the answers.” Even worse, if you don’t accept someone else as simply “who they are,” you’re labeled a hater. This is the “implicit theme song of so many of our lives.”

If this idea feels ubiquitous in movies today it's because it is. Like these lyrics that most parents already know by heart:

*The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside
Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I've tried
Don't let them in, don't let them see
Be the good girl you always have to be
Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know
Well, now they know
Let it go, let it go
Can't hold it back anymore
Let it go, let it go
Turn away and slam the door
I don't care what they're going to say
Let the storm rage on
The cold never bothered me anyway*

Mind you, *Frozen* is a great kid's movie, and by sacrificing herself for Elsa, Anna shows that true love for her sister is the answer. Yet, Matt Schneider says, "There is a double edge to all this. I like [that] these songs are countering shame, hate and discrimination. But ultimately, I can't shake the sense that their punchlines are stroking our collective egos and perpetuating a misleading myth that freedom is found in just accepting who we are. What if the authentic me that everyone is telling me to assert happens to be a selfish and manipulative person who uses others as a means to my own ends? Must you accept me because I'm being who I'm meant to be?"

The dilemma is that the Christian life is not about finding and then accepting yourself, but realizing who you are and then *dying to yourself*. Who I truly am is something deeply broken at the most foundational level due to sin. I don't need to accept myself, but repent of myself. "Sorry, but I'm not who I'm meant to be," concludes Matt Schneider. "I'm bruised, but I'm not brave... I really wish I were more like who I was meant to be, but I'm not. At least, not yet... We find freedom and healing not by looking inside of ourselves, but by looking outside of ourselves at someone else; namely, Jesus Christ."

So yes, accept who you are, but remember that the answer is "a sinner in need of a Savior." And then also accept the gift that only our Savior can bring, which is the grace we all so desperately need. Only this will provide the relationship with the living God that will let us enter into something so much deeper and richer and fulfilling than merely accepting who you are.

On the Road to Emmaus, walking with these two bewildered disciples in the midst of their **sorrowful searching**, we too can encounter the Risen Jesus. Meeting him on our journey means that we can move beyond who we are and begin to live into who, by God's grace, we can become. **Faith is not about finding yourself; it's about finding Jesus.**

When we find him, the words of Jeremiah the prophet will ring true for us: "*Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow*" (Jeremiah 31:13). The Lord bless each and every one of you on your

Lenten journey, so that all of your **sorrowful searching** leads you to the joy of Christ risen from the dead.
Amen.

Lenten Blessing

In your journeys to and fro,

God direct you;

In your trouble, suffering and sorrow,

God sustain you.

In your happiness and pleasure,

God bless you;

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you now and forever!

Amen.