

The road to Emmaus is one of the great texts of the Bible, and I'm so glad we have a chance to talk about it this morning. This text has spoken to me more than anything else I have read in our current situation

In fact, I'm so excited to talk about this text that I'm going to give away the end of my sermon right here at the beginning. Ready? Here it comes: "Make space for Jesus, and you will discover that Jesus was closer than you knew."

I hope that you will take the time and make an effort to make that space because it does not happen by accident, it does not happen by chance, and if we aren't paying attention, we might just miss it altogether.

That's what almost happened to Cleopas and his friend.

THEY GO OUT ON THE ROAD.

Our story from today is odd right from the beginning. I wanted to make sure that you were aware of the context of the story before we read it because I think it helps to understand the oddness.

The story doesn't take place several weeks after Jesus rose from the tomb. We don't meet them even several days after Jesus rose from the grave, that took place earlier this same day. That's when we find Cleopas and his friend on the way Emmaus.

The text **doesn't tell us why they were going to Emmaus.** Maybe Luke didn't think that was a detail we would be interested in knowing. It has led to some speculation. After all, when we don't understand why people do things, it can be pretty easy to come up with our reasons.

Some have suggested that maybe they were **fleeing from Jerusalem.** Perhaps they were trying to put some distance between themselves and anything that might happen there. **It was just a few days after the government had executed their leader, you can imagine that people's tensions and emotions were high.** Upon hearing that Jesus' tomb was empty, did they wonder if the Roman soldiers were going to go after Jesus' followers to find out what they had done? Did they fear for their safety?

It's possible. The text doesn't say, but you can easily imagine Cleopas saying, "Did I hear that there potential trouble brewing? And we might not be safe here? Well, you know, **that reminds me, I have a friend a few towns over who I've meant to visit for awhile.** So if you'll excuse me..." You can imagine his friend asking if he can go too.

We know what they **didn't** do. They **didn't** go to the tomb to see for themselves. They just left. Could they have been are running away? Possibly, but all the text

says is that they were walking from one town to another. They could have been running errands. They could have been going to visit friends; they could have been looking for work.

I can't prove this, of course, but I think they were just going about their daily routines. **They heard that Jesus' tomb was empty, shrugged, and went on with their lives.**

Verse 17 describes them as **"looking sad"** when asked about what they had been discussing, so it doesn't sound like they put any hope in the idea of the resurrection. Sure, there were a bunch of women who told them they had seen something, but it sounds like Cleopas and friend **did not believe them either.** Most likely they were not just sad, but also frustrated, disappointed, anxious, and maybe even angry.

As far as they knew, the story of Jesus was over. He was dead and gone forever.

That's what they thought when they were on the road.

JESUS MET THEM WHERE THEY WERE.

In several stories from the Gospels after the resurrection, we hear that people who knew Jesus didn't recognize Jesus. Again, part of me desperately wants to know the "how" and "why." **It doesn't sound like Jesus was wearing a fake mustache and glasses,** but for some reason, they just don't know it's him. But we can talk about that another day.

Jesus asks them what they're discussing, and **Cleopas gets a little snippy** with Jesus. He says to Jesus, "How are you so ignorant and uninformed that you don't even know what is going on?"

Jesus seems to **play dumb** and says, "Oh, like what?"

Here's another part of the story that gets me: they know the story. Cleopas and friend know all the details. They **had** hoped, but their hope is now in the past tense. Even the women's testimony did not give them hope. Like Peter, who saw the empty tomb and **went home,** these two heard about the empty tomb and **went back to their lives.**

Now it's Jesus' turn to **speak abruptly** to them. He calls them foolish. He calls them "slow of heart to believe," and he questions their knowledge of the prophets of their tradition. Then he goes through and explains it all to them. They had heard the stories before, but this time, there was something different about it, or perhaps I should say there was something different about them.

THE WHOLE STORY PIVOTS ON VERSE 29.

Remember how I said earlier, **“Make space for Jesus, and you will discover that Jesus was closer than you knew”?**

That’s what happens in verse 29. Until that point, these two men had just been going about their lives. They **knew about Jesus intellectually**, but what they knew had not truly touched them; it hadn’t changed them. They may have known **about** Jesus, but didn’t know Jesus.

In verse 28, Jesus was going to let them keep going their way without Him, if that’s what they wanted.

But in verse 29, they decide to make a space for Jesus in their lives, right then, and right there. **“Stay with us.”** Fortunately for them, they had the social-acceptable “excuse” of saying, “Look, it’s late, you should stay here,” but I do not doubt no matter what time of day it was, they would not have let Jesus go.

So they took that crucial step of inviting him to stay.

Whatever plans they had were set aside to make space for Jesus into their day, without fully realizing the importance of what they were doing.

And Jesus stepped in to the space they had made for Him.

That’s all it took. They only had to make space for Jesus and invite him in, and He went. That’s when everything changed.

He took bread, blessed and broke it, and suddenly their eyes were opened. They saw. They knew.

Then they saw that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They realized what the women had told them was true. They recognized Jesus was alive and had been with them before they even knew it.

Where did they meet Jesus? In the ordinary. **The mundane.**

Where did they encounter Jesus?

They **didn’t have to go to a particular building** to do it.

They were **not doing anything particularly religious** or spiritual. They were not in a church or on a retreat.

They met Jesus in an ordinary (some might even say) boring and mundane moment. They were just going about their business when Jesus came near and went with them.

But they did not realize it until they took the step of making space for Jesus.

Here's the part that gives me pause: what if they hadn't invited Jesus to stay? What if they hadn't made that space? Would they ever had figured it out that it was Jesus who was with them? I don't know. Jesus was ready to keep on walking until they asked him to stay.

WILL YOU MAKE SPACE FOR JESUS?

In some Christian groups, it is common for them to talk about inviting Jesus into your heart.

Now, that isn't the way we ususally talk about things in the Presbyterian church, but there's nothing wrong with it. I think it's a good idea, except that I don't think most people know how to do that. What do you do after you've said the prayer?

Today's reading tells us if you want to invite Jesus into your heart, start by making space for him in your life.

Or, maybe to put it another way, if you want to invite Jesus into your heart, make space for him in your calendar.

It doesn't require being in a particular building. It doesn't even require you to be doing anything all that "spiritual." After all, these two were just going about their daily routine.

Are you perhaps not just sad, but also frustrated, disappointed, anxious, and maybe even angry? That won't scare Jesus away.

Jesus was already there with them; they just didn't know it until they made space for Him. They invited Him to stay.

They made space for him in a village called Emmaus. Will you make space for him wherever you are today?