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From the Pulpit

Sermon ~ *When Our Hearts are Troubled*

The Rev. Karin Kennedy Hejmanowski ~ May 8, 2011

[Psalm 23](#)

[Luke 24:13-15](#)

Perhaps you can recall a time when you just wanted to get home. Maybe it was a particularly hard day with friends at school. You just wanted to get back to your mom or parents and family. Back to a safe place. Or for adults, maybe it was the death of a parent or grandparent or loved one. You knew you wanted to get home—sometimes that means your home of origin. Sometimes it's the home where you hold and hug your kids. Maybe it was upon hearing the news of a friend being in an accident. And whether it's been our own experience or the experience of others, we have at least watched as others longed to get home...after a disaster like the earthquake in Japan or people walking for hours on end to get home in New York City on 9/11 or the times we've heard of legendary hours or days long traffic jams when people finally just turn off their cars and walk away.

When our world has been turned upside down and we don't know exactly what comes next or should come next, a common instinct is to get home. To do whatever it takes to get there. And that's what is happening at the beginning of this story.

Cleopas and an unnamed person are on the road. From all we can tell, they are walking to their home. We never learn the name of the other person. Was it a fellow disciple? Was it his wife? Was it his son or a close friend? Whoever it was, they were deep in conversation. There was so much to talk about. They had been walking from Jerusalem and there were so many details to mull over about the last few days. This week in our own lives, the discussions have likely often

turned to the events surrounding and following the killing of Osama bin Laden. Had twitter and Facebook existed in the days of Cleopas, the posts and opinions would have been myriad. People would have had just as varied and just as strongly stated—or moreso--about what people believed and thought and how they felt about the events of the previous days—not at all to say the two are of similar magnitude.

But then someone comes along and joins them. He kinda noses his way into the conversation, but they're so eager to talk about it all that they certainly don't mind adding another perspective. Everyone had opinions. But this person didn't even seem to know what had happened. It's like he'd had no access to TV or radio or any contact with anyone for three days or more. He let them tell him what had happened and what they had heard from the women who had found that Jesus was not in the tomb. How ironic that they were explaining all of this to the very one who had exited the tomb. But somehow they were kept from recognizing the very one they were committed to following. I gotta think Jesus was having quite a bit of fun.

As they poured out the events and poured out their hearts there was a hopelessness to it. Not that long ago they had seen Jesus enter Jerusalem and hailed as a king. Palms put down on the ground like the palms our children carried into the sanctuary and people even threw their coats down on the ground. But in the week that followed their hopes and dreams were dashed and events took place for which they had no category. Jesus crucified and all at the insistence of the Jews...but...they themselves were also Jews. Remember there were no such things as Christians yet. How could people who were all hoping for the same Messiah interpret Jesus so differently? And then he had died. Had they been the ones in the wrong? But they were so sure.

Jesus, still unrecognized by them, then goes on to walk them through all the prophets and all of scripture to show them how it relates to himself. I'm SO jealous! Can you imagine having Old Testament Survey 101 taught by Jesus himself?!? I would love to hear how he walked through all those passages and what he highlighted and how he, a master teacher, phrased it all. That's SO cool.

Time must have raced by. As the off-ramp to Emmaus, such as it was, approached, Jesus wrapped up his theology lesson and prepared, so it seemed to continue on his way. But to travel

after dusk on those roads was to invite attack by bandits. And Jewish hospitality—any hospitality, one would hope—could not allow someone to continue on into such risk. So they invited Jesus to come along with them to their home. Which he did.

Some years ago when I started at my previous church in southern California, I was at one of my first presbytery meetings and met another of the pastors there. He was perhaps ten years older than me and a different ethnicity. We exchanged names and somehow realized that we both felt we had met before. We went through all the questions of when and where we had gone to seminary. Where we had done chaplaincy. Where we had lived. On a few different occasions we tried to figure out how and where we had known each other in the past. There was just a certainty on both our parts that we had met before. Despite our reflecting, we never did come to any conclusion on whether we really had met before. But I wonder if there was a similar sense of familiarity and ease between these two people and Jesus. In any case, the text tells us that they were kept from recognizing him.

But then they came into their home. And that's where all the pieces fell into place. They got to the house. No doubt they washed up according to custom. And then they sat down to eat. And whether he was invited to say a blessing because he was the guest or whether he took the initiative to do it, we don't know. But Jesus took the bread, and he broke it. The words sound familiar to us. They echo the words of institution we say each time we take communion. And that's when it happened. Their eyes were opened. Suddenly they knew it was Jesus! And that changed EVERYTHING!

At that very moment, Jesus vanished. But everything had already changed. It was all clear. And even as they began to gather their things once again, it all made sense. "Weren't our hearts burning within us?" Hadn't there been something different about this man that walked with them? Was it his teaching, his demeanor, his kind countenance, the gait of his walk? Perhaps all of it.

There was no time to worry about bandits. They got up and retraced their steps to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what they had just experienced. Because when there's news this good, you can't keep it to yourself!

When our hearts are troubled, when our world is tossed and turned or feels like it has come to a halt altogether, it is then more than ever that we need hope. And when things seem on edge or we don't know where to turn, it is then that we remember the source of our hope. Our hope is not in governments that have the power to crucify a Messiah or declare a war or change interest rates or kill the world's most wanted man. Our hope is not in the securities market or in companies that IPO or in wealth. Our hope is in Jesus Christ alone. The One who broke the bread at table with them. The one who had broken the bread at table with the disciples on the night of his arrest. The one who had said the broken bread symbolizes his broken body . . . and then proceeded to allow his body to be broken that we might be saved and healed.

The story of the road to Emmaus gives us hope because we are not so different from Cleopas and the other disciple. At times we may be beset with despair. Or we may find ourselves bereft of hope. Or we may be at a loss of how to respond. But this story tells us—it reminds us—that we need not be without hope and there is no reason to despair. Though our hearts may grieve for a time, our Lord is with us. He walks with us always. We are not alone. His broken and resurrected body is our hope. So brothers and sister, walk in hope. Whether you are young or less young, well or struggling for health, whether you are full of faith or struggle to hold to faith, take confidence that our hope rests in Christ alone. The Christ who meets us where we are and walks with us every step of the way. Amen