

## OUT OF CONTEXT

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Luke 24:13-35

One of my great fears as a pastor is that while out in public I might encounter one of you but not recognize you. This might take place at Kroger, at the airport, or in Nashville at a big concert. The reason that I would not recognize you is that you would be out of context. I expect to see you here in church, but not in these other places and so without these familiar surroundings I might not know.

I certainly could be wrong on this but to my knowledge, I have never not recognized a church member. The reverse has happened to me on several occasions over the years when someone couldn't place me right away. I might be at the hardware store on a Saturday morning and a person will give me that look and say "don't I know you?" Eventually, it will get around to me telling them that I am the pastor at the Presbyterian church. "Oh, yeah," they will say. Then I will see in their eyes that they are thinking to themselves, of course I didn't recognize him; he's out of context here in the hardware store wearing cargo shorts, flip flops, and a Pink Floyd concert tee shirt from 1980. He could use a shave, too. His mother wouldn't recognize him. We then part ways with a smile and I tell the person that I look forward to seeing them at church again... probably at Easter.

Our reading today from Luke's gospel is the story we call **The Walk to Emmaus**. As you recall, Jesus has been executed. He was crucified on the day before the Sabbath. On the day after the Sabbath, at dawn, the women among the disciples go to the tomb where Jesus' corpse had been placed in order that they might make the preparations for a proper burial. It was too late in the day on the day before the Sabbath to what was needed. At the tomb, they discover that the body is missing. Two angels are there and ask them why they are looking for the living among the dead. The women rush back to tell the others but no one believes them because their story is too preposterous.

Our reading for today takes place later on that same day and focuses on two of Jesus' followers. These two—one is named Cleopas, the other is unidentified—presumably, are headed back home from being in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Following the unexpected defeat of the one who promised salvation to the world, Cleopas and his companion appear to be calling it quits. If the world refuses to see the potential for good, then there is nothing more they can hope to do. They are going home.

As they travel, they discuss the events of the past few days—the lies, the deceit, the violence they've seen. As they walk, a stranger joins them. It is Jesus, but for some reason *their eyes were kept from recognizing him*. The stranger asks what they

have been talking about. They stop, and sadness engulfs their faces. With open bewilderment Cleopas asks the man, *Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?* The stranger asks, *What things?* And the two answer, *The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death. They crucified him. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*

*It has been three days since he died and some women in our group were at the tomb early this morning. Jesus' body was gone and the women told us they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of those who were with us checked this out and found it just as the women had said.*

So then the stranger says to the men, *Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart [you are] to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?* Then the stranger begins to teach the two about Moses and the prophets and the words of the scripture that witness to the savior.

Finally, the trio arrives at the day's destination. The stranger walks on but the two beg him to stay with them. They are hungry to hear more. At dinner, while they are at table together, the stranger *took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.* When he did this suddenly the two recognized the stranger for who he was. And then Jesus disappeared.

The two admit that the whole time that the stranger had spoken to them that their *hearts had burned.* Even though it is late in the day, they get up and hurriedly return to Jerusalem. They find the disciples and the others. From them, they hear a similar story, *The Lord has risen indeed.*

One of the things I like about this story is that the two on the road are not special. We have never heard of Cleopas and we won't hear of him again. You would expect that Jesus would appear first to one of the twelve (well, maybe not Judas) but certainly Simon Peter, James, or John—those are his first-string players. But instead Jesus appears to a couple of bench warmers who don't even recognize him. For me, this is a message of hope—Jesus is available to all who believe, not just the elite.

And why didn't these two recognize Jesus on the road? We don't know. Maybe because it was the context. Certainly, the last person they expected to see that day was Jesus. After all, he was dead. Or, as some suggest, maybe Jesus looked different, that he was unrecognizable. Dying does strange things to you. We just don't know.

The point I want to make is that for these two, Jesus really was out of context. It's not just that they didn't expect to see him, it is that as the risen Lord they don't know who he is. The Christ had not yet been revealed to them.

Revelation is an inspired understanding of God and Christ. [more] For those who have not experienced God's revelation then Jesus will always be out of context. For those without revelation, Jesus may be a prophet, a martyr, a teacher, someone to look up to, but he is not the Messiah, the Savior, the son of God.

Luke lays out some rules for revelation in this story. Remember, Luke is teaching his people and you can be sure that some have asked "what is revelation?" Luke is asserting that it is not enough to simply know the facts of Jesus' life. Cleopas and his friend could recite these and more—Jesus was a prophet mighty in word and deed, he was crucified, he was buried but the body could not be found, angels declared that he was alive. This is a clear and concise synopsis of Jesus' life, but according to Luke, it is not revelation. I am sure there were some in Luke's congregation who claimed that they "knew" Jesus because they knew about him, but this is not enough.

As Luke teaches in this in this story, one must also know the ancient scriptures and understand how these give witness to Jesus. Moses and the prophets point to Jesus as savior.

If followers of Jesus know his story—that he lived and suffered—and if they know the scriptures, which point to him as savior, then they are open to Christ being revealed to them in the sacraments. For Cleopas and his friend, the sacramental meal begins when they extend hospitality to the stranger on the road. The stranger becomes the Christ who breaks bread, blesses it, and shares it. In doing this, the Christ is revealed to those at the table.

For those who previously could not see, we now learn *Their eyes were opened and they recognized him*. As one theologian writes, the disciples have now experienced Christ in word and sacrament."<sup>1</sup> Back in chapter 10 of Luke's gospel, Jesus informed the disciples, *no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him* (10:22).

These appearances of Jesus, Luke tells us, will continue for forty days. Luke has taught us about Jesus—his life and ministry—he has outlined the expectations placed upon those who wish to follow Jesus, he has described how Jesus had to suffer and die. And now, in the defeat of death, he shows us how we may truly see Jesus, that we may truly be disciples.

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<sup>1</sup>Craddock, p. 286

And finally, I want to ask that as you live your lives as disciples that you purposely live out of context. The job of a disciple is not to blend in with the world but to live beyond it, beyond the context of the world. I would urge you to live in such a way that when the world looks at you the world is not sure if it knows who you are because you are not doing the things of this world. Instead, you are doing the things of Christ.

Amen.