

You Never Know Who You Will Run Into

April 24, 2011

Texts: Luke 24:13-35

I am Cleopas of Emmaus, one of Jesus' disciples, though not one of the twelve he chose first, a disciple just the same. My friend and I walked day after day with him along dusty or muddy roads, slept in barns, town squares, and under the stars out in the country side. We laughed and ate with him, hurt and cried with him. We witnessed amazing miracles and wonders at his hands that had never been seen on earth before. His words were the very essence of life - we hung on every one of them. We shared his life for over three years. It was the greatest experience I had ever known or expect to know until we join him in heaven.

I could tell of our journey together down the Jordan River valley to Jericho and about the shocking events that followed when we got to Jerusalem. When he was arrested and tried the day before the Passover feast I was crushed. We were hoping for a return of the glory days like under King David and the Maccabees. It was clear that we were wrong, very wrong about Jesus. He had plenty of support. We would have died for him leading a revolution against the Romans. We had plenty of training, but the kind of revolution he was preparing us for was a different kind - win the war one heart at a time, by love, not violence. Looking back on that day, it should not have surprised us when he made no effort to resist or defend himself before the high priest or Pilate, but it did.

When they crucified him it pierced my heart like the spikes that pierced his hands and feet. I have to admit I was afraid to show my face on Friday - we just hid out thinking that we might be next to be nailed up. We all were so stunned that we could hardly say a word to one another, good or bad. It was a long two days and nights waiting for, but for what? On Sunday some of the women came back hysterical about the tomb door being moved and his body missing, but that seemed absurd. Peter and John went to see for themselves, and when they returned they confirmed it. **What NOW?**

Mary told later of waiting for hours at the tomb until someone came she thought was the gardener. Assuming he moved the body, she asked him where he put him so she could take him. Instead of a curt answer, she heard a voice speak her name, "Mary." Though she did not recognize him, instantly she knew it was the Lord, calling her own name just as when he delivered her from the demons that had enslaved her. What a shocking surprise to find him alive, in the flesh. She said she even held him close; he was no ghost. Then he quickly sent her back to the other disciples to share the news that he was alive. The most profound word of the most wondrous event in history, delivered by a **woman** with a questionable past. No man would believe such news from a woman. **UNBELIEVABLE!**

It was too fantastic; too much to comprehend, nor had we seen any sign of him for ourselves. We decided to go home to Emmaus. Getting through Jerusalem still seemed risky, but we took the chance and made the western gate to the road home. But, the road went right beside the place where they crucified him - Golgotha, the rock of the Skull. It was all we could do to drag our bodies up that hill. To think that Jesus' blood was spilled right there - we could almost hear it screaming at us, "**Where are you going?**" We hurried past the garden that stretched out like a peaceful carpet below the road. Could that be the place where he was buried? I can't believe someone would take his body or whatever happened to it? What were we to believe?

It was taking a lot longer than usual to make the trip because of the jammed streets and our dragging feet. We still had quite a way to go when we noticed a fellow in a cloak walking up alongside us. We were glad to have another traveling companion; Safety in numbers, you know. We were talking about how we felt with the Lord gone now. The whole idea of a new kingdom seemed to have evaporated

with the morning's mist. What could we do? Go back to working the family farm, I guess. How boring after all we had seen and done the last few years with Jesus.

He seemed real interested in our conversation, asking us what we were talking about and why we were so sad. I couldn't believe anyone coming from Jerusalem wouldn't know about Jesus' trial and execution. He must have been staying in a cave. We told him we were talking about Jesus, the teacher from Nazareth. We believed he was to be the Messiah we have been waiting for so long.

At that he began to tell us about the scriptures - all the prophecies about David's descendant who was foretold by all the prophets. He was to suffer and die at the hands of his own countrymen like so many of the prophets. But, he was also going to rise from the dead to conquer death and hell for anyone who believed in him. I couldn't believe my ears - it was as if Jesus himself was teaching us from the Scriptures again. Something about him - so familiar - like I have known him someplace before - almost like being with him again - that same stirring in our hearts again!

We had been walking into the setting sun listening to this stranger who seemed to know all the answers. It would be dark soon. We couldn't let him go on alone in the dark, hungry. It took some effort but we convinced him to stay the night and have a bite to eat with us. There is always room in our home for another friend, even a new friend. My wife must have had an idea I may be coming home because she had prepared a meal, fresh bread and all. After washing we sat down at table to eat. It seemed fitting to ask our friend to do the honors of offering thanks to Heaven and breaking the unleavened bread. He spoke to the Father in the most intimate way just like Jesus did.

All of the sudden we realized this WAS JESUS!

It was a miracle. All that time and we didn't even recognize him. His words stirred our hearts like no one else could. We were eating dinner with the Lord himself. It was Him in the flesh, just as the woman had said. How was it possible? It was too much to comprehend. All I know is that he found us, running away from all he had tried to do and turned us around.

Just as suddenly, he was gone from our presence without a breeze or door latch - into thin air.

We thought that life with Jesus was over for us - life in the Spirit of God. But now, everything was changed. How could we just sit there? We had to get back to tell the rest about it - it was true **HE IS ALIVE!**

It wasn't an easy trek back to the City, IN THE DARK, but we made it in record time. Nothing could stop us from getting back to tell them. When we got there to tell them about everything that happened to us on the road and at dinner. But, before we could get a word out they were shouting and jumping up and down, **The Lord is Risen.** After he appeared to Mary then he appeared to Simon Peter as well. He appeared in person, but they didn't recognize him at first! What a party. It was more than amazing. **What had died, on the cross, and in our hearts, burst forth from the tomb to new life for every one of us.**

Have you met that man yet? Did you recognize him? You never know who you might run into. It may just be Jesus. He has been searching for you on the road of your life. You have surely brushed shoulders with him without knowing it like we did. He knows your pain, your failures, he listens and cares. He has the answers you are looking for. **HE IS ALIVE FOR YOU TOO.** Don't miss him today. He came forth to open the tomb of your heart. **HE IS RISEN! PRAISE GOD!**