

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“RECOGNIZNG CHRIST”
Luke 24:13-35
April 6, 2008
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

How do you explain Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb not recognizing the risen Christ? And how do you explain the two disciples on the road to Emmaus walking and talking with Christ for many miles that same day and they too did not recognize him?

It was on that first Easter Sunday. Christ had been resurrected, but he had not shown himself to all of his disciples. Two of them were headed out of Jerusalem toward a village called Emmaus, about a seven mile journey. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they didn't recognize him. The Living Bible says, ***“But God kept them from recognizing him.”*** Now that is interesting. Was this some kind of test?

Christ asked them, ***“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”***

The two disciples stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked, ***“Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?”***

“What things?” the stranger asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. ***“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”***

And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see him."

The risen Christ said to them, *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"* And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, *"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over."* So he went in to stay with them and had a meal with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

They returned at once to Jerusalem. There they met the other disciples who told them, *"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."* Then the two told what had happened to them, and how they recognized Jesus when he broke the bread.

Several things seem obvious from this story. First of all, here is additional evidence to support something we noted on Easter Sunday--**the disciples were not expecting Jesus to rise from the grave**. Even though he had tried to prepare them for this event, they didn't have a clue. They were confused. They were grieving. They were starting to scatter, perhaps out of fear that their lives might be in danger too. The two disciples in our story for the day were leaving Jerusalem. They were defeated. Their dreams lay in dust. It was time to get away and to reflect on their future. What were they to do with their lives now? Go back to fishing or farming or whatever they had done before Christ called them? The last thing they expected was to meet Jesus on the road to their new destination.

But that happens, doesn't it? **Just when we think the world has caved in on us and there is no point to it all, we encounter Christ.**

That's happened here at Park Hill! The church was on a downward spiral. We were losing members and feeling defeated. But just when we thought we had hit the bottom, we encountered Christ on our road to Emmaus.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience in which God spoke to you. You were at the end of your rope, hanging on for dear life. And then, a friend said something and you realized this was a message from God. Or you heard a song, or read a story, and it was as if Christ was speaking directly to you. This happens most often to those who are believers. Notice that after Christ's resurrection, he showed himself only to those who believed in him. That's true in our lives. If you have surrounded yourself with a veil of skepticism, you might not hear God speak. But if, in your time of trial, you ask God to show Himself to you, you will be surprised how often that prayer will be answered.

God is not dead. God is not buried in the ground. God is alive and God is with us. That's what the disciples discovered on the road to Emmaus. They were discouraged, downhearted, defeated. And just when they were ready to give up, they encountered the Master.

In 1972, NASA launched an exploratory space probe called Pioneer 10. The mission of Pioneer 10 was to fly to Jupiter and take pictures of the planet and moons, and send back data about the atmosphere, magnetic field, and radiation belts. Many scientists did not think this would be possible, because they feared that the probe would be destroyed in the asteroid belt, and up to this point, no probe had made it past Mars. But, Pioneer 10 completed its mission in November of 1973, and continued to travel into space. By 1997, the probe had traveled six billion miles from the sun. In spite of the great distance, scientists are still able to pick up radio signals from the probe that they can still decipher. What is more remarkable than that is that these signals are sent by an 8-watt transmitter, which is only as powerful as a night light, and it takes the signal nine hours to get to earth. (1)

It is always amazing to me that a generation that takes for granted the wonders of science is so quick to dismiss the power and the purpose of the

Creator who set it all in motion in the first place. God is alive. God is personal. God cares about you and God desires to reveal Himself to you just as Christ revealed himself to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Of course the place that this is most likely to happen is in worship.

Notice how this story ends. *“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?’*

“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.”

Notice they recognized Christ when he opened the scriptures to them and when he broke the bread. It would be impossible to ignore the link between this experience of the disciples and the preaching of the word and the taking of the sacrament in worship. Where do you most often find God? Right here in this room, when the scriptures are opened and the bread is broken--this is where you are most likely to encounter Christ; where the word is preached and the sacrament is served.

The best reason for going to church is to find God. Or better yet, to open ourselves to the God who is searching for us. This is where we encounter the Holy. I hope that’s why you’re here--to hear from heaven. It’s all right if you are here because you like the music, or if you think it’s the thing to do, or you’re here because it’s good for the children. That’s all right. But in this room are the echoes of eternity. When the scriptures are read, when the bread is broken, when we bow in supplication before the throne of God, God is here. I would love to be your pastor to help you open ourselves to God and help you hear God speak to your hearts.