

Message: Journeying with Jesus

Do you like to travel?

Whether it's learned or part of their make up, some people love to take trips. It could be a day trip to the beach or mountains or just to see the sights in a nearby city. We have some who love to camp. Some travel regionally, up and down California or to neighboring states. Some travel nationally, coast to coast and everywhere in between. And then there's international travel, visiting other countries. Some visit family and friends in their country of origin, while others love the opportunity to sail the seas or meet people who are different.

There are other kinds of journeys we take in life. Our paths are as diverse as we are. They reflect our different views, experiences, interests and choices. For example, some of us prefer “stay-cations” to getting on a plane or in a car. We follow different career paths because of the experiences and interests we discover or the needs of our family. We choose schools, churches, restaurants, entertainment and stuff based on our views, experiences and interests.

One journey we're all on is life. We all go through different stages in life. In 1984, Gail Sheehy wrote a book, Passages, describing these developmental stages. Where we are in life helps us to find our place. The questions we ask ourselves change as we learn and develop. Our questions shift from “Who am I?” to “Am I okay?” to “Why am I doing this?” to “What do I really believe in?” Whether we consciously seek answers or not, we're shaped by what we find in our heart, mind and spirit. We find our identity with a peer group, a sexual role, occupation and world view. Our view of the world isn't limited to what we see, own or desire, though.

We're all on a spiritual journey. The Pew foundation tells us 80% of Americans are seeking a deeper spiritual life. That means we know our life isn't just about activities and stuff. We desperately hope for something beyond the disappointments, hurts and fears of life. According to Dr. Val Hastings, most children develop a negative self-image by the age of eight!¹ That makes my heart sad, but it rings true.

¹ J. Val Hastings, *Coaching4Clergy*, 2013

Don't we criticize and pull others down to puff ourselves up? Sure we do and we teach our children to do so, too. There's another path. We can build our children and each other up. Good, healthy spiritual practices grounded in God's love free us from the negative views and control of the world, giving us hope and a new, life-giving perspective.

Today's Bible narrative from Luke 24 is famous. It shows us a new perspective and calls us to Jesus' mission. It's the basis for the Walk to Emmaus community. Do we have any alumni? It's a great experience. I recommend it. The disciples' encounter with the risen Christ is inspiring. It touches our heart, mind and spirit.

Jesus had hundreds of followers. This narrative tells us about two of them: Cleopas and “a player to be named at a later date.” After the roller coaster ride of the week, the two were walking seven miles down the hillside path to Emmaus. They were talking about events. Passover was over. Jesus was dead. The temple, Roman and Israeli authorities were all saying different things. There must have been a lot of finger pointing. That's always the way it is. People want to know “Why?” Add a disturbing message from Mary about an empty tomb and angels appearing to that mix and there's plenty to discuss!

Something unusual happened on this journey. They were joined by a man, who asked them a question, “*What are you talking about?*” (v17). The two were surprised. There's only one road. The stranger had to come from Jerusalem, which was buzzing with the news of Jesus' crucifixion. So they asked, “*How can you not know about the things that happened?*” (v18). The stranger asked, “*What things?*” (v19).

They tell him: they hoped Jesus was the one to save Israel. But he died. There's all this controversy about it. The movement is dead.

That's when the trip became odder. The stranger challenged their faith and trust in God. He essentially said, “*Don't you know all those things had to happen?*” (v26). In other words, “*Your idea of who the Messiah is and why he came are off track! Here's why...*” (v27).

The stranger, Jesus, gave them a personal lesson. Using the Hebrew Scripture, Jesus showed them who the Messiah really was and how he honored God's promise to save those who believe in and trust God.

Jesus shows them, clearly and specifically, that his mission has been God’s mission all along.

The two travelers were hooked. I don’t know about you, but I think that must have been an awesome lesson! In fact, when they got to the place where they were going to stop for the night, Luke tells us they “*strongly*” invited him to sit down and share a meal with them (v28).

The stranger did.

That’s when Jesus revealed himself by breaking bread.

Jesus reminded them of the last supper he shared with them.

Jesus’ table is open to all who seek God’s presence, then and now.

Then he vanished.

Jesus revealed his presence in a supernatural way.

He was no longer a stranger on a journey, but the Messiah come to show his followers the way. The two disciple’s reaction tells us a lot. Within the hour, they made arrangements and they hiked back up the hill to Jerusalem in the dark to tell the other disciples what happened.

The two disciples were on a spiritual journey and they didn’t even know it! Jesus joined them on their journey, challenging them and showing them how God is present in their lives. They learned what means to believe in a Savior. Jesus invited them, and invites us, to join him on a spiritual journey, a path that doesn’t stop at death. The same is true outside the walls of churches today in communities all across the globe. Our spirits and hearts are pulled in one way, but our culture pulls our minds in another direction. Jesus invites us to trust God and believe in him, even when we don’t understand.

If you’re like me, this passage speaks to my heart, mind and spirit.

My spirit is pulled by the supernatural presence of Christ. My heart is pulled by what Jesus revealed, the depth of his love. My head? Well, my head’s a bit confused.

After all, there are two questions we’re all wondering about.

First, why didn’t the two disciples recognize Jesus? I don’t know. There are a lot of possible answers, including “They were filled with grief and so, like Mary, they didn’t recognize him” to “Maybe his face

was swollen from the beatings.” There’s no mention of either, so it’s just idle speculation. I believe it wasn’t time yet. Jesus didn’t want them to recognize him until they’d received instruction to share with the disciples. He had the power to make it so and he did. It’s not a reason to disbelief.

Second, what did Jesus teach? We don’t know. I think we have some good clues. Jesus’ mission was to share good news with everyone. God will save them. Jesus is God’s Son, sent to do so. That’s good news! It speaks to our heart, mind and spirit. God goes further, though.

There’s a reference that gives us insight. The 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews begins with these words, *“Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see. The elders in the past were approved because they showed faith. By faith we understand that the universe has been created by a word from God so that the visible came into existence from the invisible”* (CEB). That matches up pretty well with Jesus appearing as a stranger who proves he’s human and then vanishes supernaturally. Jesus reveals himself as human and divine.

I invite you to check out the “by faith” passages in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. By faith our ancestors trusted God and experienced God’s presence in their life journeys. By faith, Abel showed he was righteous. By faith, Enoch pleased God so much that God took him directly to heaven! By faith, Noah built an ark for events he hadn’t seen, even though he was criticized. By faith, Abraham obeyed and received God’s promise. By faith, Sarah was given a child at the age of ninety in order to fulfill God’s promise of countless spiritual descendants. By faith, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, David, Samuel and prophets lived (Hebrews 11:20-32). These weren’t perfect people, but they had faith. Yes, some doubted at first, but they all came through when it mattered, trusted God and had faith. They believed. They were approved for their faith (v39), but they had to wait. It wasn’t until Jesus came to save us that God’s promise of salvation was fulfilled.

Don’t let your head get in the way! Open your heart to Jesus. Ask for forgiveness, accept God’s love and receive the Holy Spirit. Take a step onto the spiritual path leading to light and life.

Jesus comes to us, wherever we are on our spiritual journey of life. He may seem like a stranger to us at first. Jesus may come disguised as a neighbor, family member, friend or someone in need. You can't tell. Trust and follow him and you'll "see." Jesus will reveal to us the depth, power and glory of God's love. He'll send the Holy Spirit to teach us and prompt us onto the path of health and life lived with passion. Jesus calls us, prepares us and reveals himself to us. Our part in the divine drama of spiritual life is to run and share our experience with others so they can hear the call, believe and trust God.

Where are you on your spiritual journey? We're all on a path going somewhere. We're all talking about all the things going on in the world.

How is God present in your life? Jesus is waiting to reveal himself. All he wants is our invitation to stop and stay for a while. Make a commitment ... find a "home base" and devote yourself to it.

Let us pray:

God, we're thirsty. We have spent our money and energy on things that have not satisfied. God, our souls are hungry. We need food for our soul. Help us to come to you, Lord. You know our hesitation. You know how suspicious we are of your extravagant invitation. Help us to come as eager children, ready to receive good things from you. Feed our souls, Lord, until they are full of delight. Amen

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV)

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart 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 beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.