

Luke 24:13-35

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.

Sermon

When I was in seminary, I interned for a while at Grady Memorial Hospital, the big Level 1 trauma center in downtown Atlanta - I was a young minister, and a fairly naive kid.

And I spent a lot of time in the emergency room, with families who had lost their parents to heart attacks, or whose brothers had been in tragic accidents, and even with a mother who had seen her teenage son shot in the face.



The city of Atlanta is a majority black city, and this hospital served them well.

So, I got to spend a lot of time ministering to African-American people. And after I had spent some time there, I realized that there were a lot of women in the African American community who reacted to crises like these in a very different way than I might have expected.

You see, my way of responding to a crisis is to jump into action, and to look for something to do - it's not always a great response - because the truth is that there often wasn't anything for me to do, but to mourn and to feel that hurt. I often find myself getting in the way of people like doctors who are actually trained to help, not because I have anything real to offer, but just because I need something to do. So, I certainly know that there is no "right or wrong way" to react to crisis, loss, fear, and pain.

But, there were a number of the women that I got to meet who would react to a crisis or a tragedy in almost the opposite way than what I would have done. They called it "Falling Out". They would literally fall down onto the ground. They would scream out "No, no, no!" They would

cry there on the floor of the hospital. And their love for their children or their husbands would just pour out of them. They didn't try to hide the depth of this love. They didn't pretend that they could just move on without their beloved mother. They didn't ignore the pain of their loss. They just got down on the floor and let it all out.

As a quiet little white guy, I have to admit, that it made me pretty uncomfortable, and at first, I didn't know what to do. But, if I wanted to be a good chaplain, I had to learn how to care for them in a different way than was natural to me. I was really grateful for my supervisor there, an amazing chaplain and a black woman herself. She helped me reflect on those experiences and pushed me to respond to them in the way that I thought God might respond.

So, instead of trying to "lift them up" like I might have wanted someone to do for me. Instead of responding in a way that would make **me** more comfortable. I had to learn to go to where they were.

I had to learn how to get down on the floor with them. I had to learn to cry with them and hurt with them, to shout up to God for help with them. They didn't need someone to fix them or make them whole. They needed someone to fall apart with them, so that they knew they weren't alone.

People in our community are going through a moment of crisis in so many different ways right now:

- People whose health is vulnerable still fear this coronavirus, as our city starts to go back to normal social distancing. We worry about another spike and all the pain that would cause our communities.
- At the same time, African-American people are mourning the unjust killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, and worried that the same thing could happen to them, or their

brothers, sisters, or sons.



All of us are experiencing some sense of crisis or trauma, outrage or fear in these days.

Jesus' disciples experienced these same kinds of feelings when they saw Jesus die. The scripture says that their heads were cast down as they trudged on back home to Emmaus. They had lost their leader and their friend. They had lost their hope for a better world, for liberation and salvation.

And Jesus didn't tell them to put on a smile and think positive. He didn't grab them by the arm and try to pull them up.

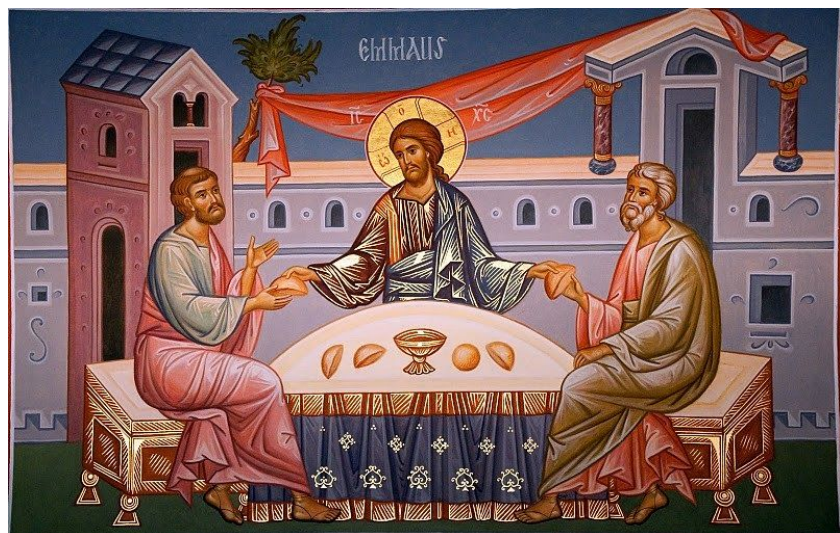
No, instead Jesus went to where they were. He walked the long journey with them. He spoke with them of their pain and loss. He went into their homes, that place where we are most fully ourselves. And there, he broke bread for them.

When I first started at Grady, and I saw these African American women falling out, I would try to take hold of their arms and pull them up from the ground - but they just fought back and screamed out louder. Because they knew that I couldn't make it all better for them and that I couldn't ever really take away their pain.

But, as I learned to get down on the floor with them, I was able to see that they had the power within themselves, that once they worked through their mourning and their anger and their pain, once they expressed the depth of their love, for God and all to hear - they had the power to stand up on their own. And only then, could we truly stand with together.

Jesus comes into our homes, into hearts, into our fear and pain and crisis - and he walks with us when we're walking the long walk of crisis and hurt. He sits with us when we sit in our loneliness or despair. And when we are hungry, he takes the bread that we have in our house, just like he took the bread that he found in the house of his disciple in Emmaus. And he gives thanks and he breaks it so that he can share it with us, just the same way that he shared the hurt and fear, the mourning and despair that they carried with them all the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

We break bread together today, because we know that through this meal that we share, Jesus Christ is coming into our world, so that he can walk with us, so that he can share the burden of our pain and loneliness and righteous anger. Jesus is coming into our homes, where quarantine has made family life difficult. Jesus is coming into our hearts, where we carry our



deepest despairs. Jesus is coming into our protest, because he sees the brokenness of our world as well.

Jesus is coming down onto the hospital room floor with us - because he knows that with him by our side and in our heart, we have the strength, that after we have done the hard work of mourning and felt the fullness of our pain, we too can stand up on our own two feet. And when we do, Jesus will stand with us and we will walk together toward a world where justice and new life can flourish and grow.

Amen.

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