

“When Life Doesn’t Make Sense”

Luke 24: 36b-48

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What do you do when life doesn’t make sense? How many times have you asked this question? How many times did the disciples ask it during the final days of Jesus’ life? Almost everything Jesus did in Jerusalem during Passover made no sense to them and had to leave them shaking their heads in disbelief.

For starters, none of the disciples wanted to attend Passover that year. When Jesus announced he was going to Bethany, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, near the time for Passover to help Lazarus and his family, the disciples tried to talk him out of making that trip.

They knew how angry the religious leaders were over the remarks Jesus had been making about their insincerity and lavish lifestyles. When Jesus exposed their addictions to power, prestige and money, the disciples knew the religious authorities would stop at nothing to arrest Jesus.

The disciples were greatly concerned about Jesus’ safety and their own. For this reason, they did their best to talk Jesus out of going anywhere near Jerusalem. When their attempts failed, Thomas told the other disciples, “Let us also go that we may die with him.” (John 11:16)

Reluctantly, the disciples accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem, no doubt hoping to convince him to tone down the rhetoric and to be discreet so they would not attract attention. Jesus’ entrance into the Holy City riding on a donkey while adoring crowds waved palm branches and shouted hosanna had to frustrate some of the disciples.

Their hopes for being discreet were shattered even more the next day when Jesus went to the temple and created a scene. Instead of blending in with the crowd, Jesus openly condemned those selling animals and exchanging money at exorbitant prices.

So incensed was Jesus over this mistreatment of the poor and powerless pilgrims who had come to celebrate Passover that he turned over the tables of the money changers, scattering their coins everywhere. Jesus then ran the moneychangers out of the temple, along with those who were selling animals for sacrifices.

So much for being discreet.

This was not the last thing Jesus did which confused the disciples that week. On Thursday evening when he gathered with the disciples in the Upper Room, he took a basin of water, along with a towel, and he proceeded to wash their feet, which caught them completely by surprise. What was this all about they must have wondered.

And then on Friday, their worst fears materialized when Jesus was crucified. How could this happen? Why didn't he listen to them? What were they to do now?

The questions did not end on Friday, though. When the women discovered on Sunday morning the tomb where Jesus had been buried was open and empty, the disciples were completely baffled. How could this be? Surely someone had stolen his body, but why? Hadn't the authorities done enough to this innocent man who devoted his entire life to helping others?

One by one the disciples made their way back to the Upper Room on Sunday evening to discuss the things they didn't understand. Suddenly, two men from Emmaus barged into the room and told everyone there about their experience with the risen Lord in their home.

As they were processing this incredible story, Jesus appeared in their midst to dispel their fears and doubts. He opened their hearts, eyes and minds as he explained the scriptures to them and helped them to understand what they had been unable to comprehend.

Finally, they were getting some answers, which lifted their spirits. They still had more questions than answers, but the clouds of defeat and despair were giving way to the light of hope and joy.

Why do you think Luke included this story in his narrative? What did he want his readers to take away from this particular post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples? Perhaps it was this.

Their most teachable moments would occur in their darkest hours when they were confused, bewildered, afraid and frustrated, and Luke wanted them to be ready. Jesus could always be counted on to do his best work in their lives when they were at their lowest point, and life did not make sense.

He certainly did that evening in the Upper Room. That night the disciples learned more about Jesus than they had known. They came to a deeper understanding of who he was, what was important to him, what he was sent by God to do and how he fulfilled his mission.

The disciples also received a clearer vision of what they were to do, the kind of helping and healing ministry they were to have. When Jesus "opened their minds" they saw him and

themselves in ways they never had. They more clearly saw what he did and what they were to do.

Just as this was true for the disciples who gathered in the Upper Room three days after Jesus died like a common criminal, it would be true for all of Jesus' followers for generations to come. The same risen Lord who opened the hearts, eyes and minds of the first disciples would be there when other disciples needed him. He would use every experience, good or bad, to help them grow and mature in their faith.

I believe this includes us. If this passage teaches us anything it is that the Christian life is a movement from fear to faith to joy. All three are found here, just as they are in each of our lives.

Where are you on that faith journey today? Do you have more questions than answers? Do the pieces of the puzzle you have been handed not fit together? Do you often find yourself shaking your head in disbelief?

What knocked the props out from under you and sent you reeling in despair? Was it the death of someone very dear and precious to you or the demise of your marriage? Did you get passed over for a promotion or lose your job? Did you get a bad health report or are you struggling with a recurring mental illness? Did a friend betray you or abandon you? Were you scorned for doing something good?

What do you do during these times? Do what the disciples did. Open your life to God and others.

Like the disciples, find a support group where you can explore the mysteries of life and faith. Share your experiences, struggles and doubts. Listen as others share theirs, along with the lessons they learned from those experiences.

At the same time, study the scriptures and pray more intensely than you ever have. Allow Jesus to draw near and open your eyes, heart and mind. Remember, this is his specialty.

If you do this, I believe over time your blind spots will be cleared and the clouds around you will lift. Like those first disciples and Luke's readers, your fear will turn to joy as you come to understand you are not alone, and your life is not over.

Joy will return when you discover the risen Lord will walk with you out of the cemetery of broken dreams, helping you to rebuild your life and to chart a new course.

Will you let Jesus draw near you today and help you turn whatever you are going through into a teachable moment? Will you let him help you dream new dreams and use you in ways you never imagined to help those who are struggling?

Will you let Jesus give you the wisdom, courage and strength you need to chart a new course? Will you let Jesus renew your passion, purpose and zeal for life?

I hope so, and I am sure those who love you most feel the same way.