

“I WANT JESUS TO WALK WITH ME”

Luke 24:13-35 ¹

I’ve probably told you a number of times and in various ways that I was blessed with wonderful parents who took their faith very seriously. My Mom, a seminary graduate herself, got involved in literacy work with immigrants during the Cuban immigration boom of the late 50’s and early 60’s, and she kept it up all her life.

She was one of the founders of the Mid-South Literacy Council in Memphis, and so long as she could drive, and beyond that so long as Dad could drive her, she taught African-Americans in the inner city of Memphis how to read. When I took her to the literacy building on her 90th birthday, the door was opened for us by a senior adult who, when he recognized her, told her, “Mrs. Stancil, you’re the one who taught me how to read!”

It was perhaps in that context that Mom had this song sung at her funeral service:

I want Jesus to walk with me.
I want Jesus to walk with me.
All along my pilgrim journey,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

I don’t know that either of my parents were overtly involved in the Civil Rights Movement, but they were deeply committed to improving African and African-American lives.

And so it is that we come to worship on this first Sunday of Black History Month, with each service themed around an African-American Spiritual. This week, it’s “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.”

Being able to walk is a big deal. During my late-elementary and middle-school years, I frequently had to miss school because I couldn’t walk due to a disease now called dyshydrosis. And now, sixty years later, as I walk briskly from place to place, I still thank God that my feet are whole, and that I can walk. Now, though, I sometimes walk more slowly due to arthritis. Does anybody know what I’m talking about?

There’s a saying in the military that “an army is only as strong as the feet of its soldiers.” If soldiers can’t walk, they’re not much good to an army. Being able to walk is a Big Deal. Remember to be grateful when you walk through curbs cut out for wheelchairs—both for that provision for those who need it and for the fact that you don’t need it . . . at least, not today.

Our feet are not generally thought of as beautiful, but they *are* pretty amazing. There are 206 bones in our bodies, fifty-two of which are in our feet—one-fourth! Our feet support our entire weight, and they absorb the impact of our walking and running. The health of our feet affects the health of our back, our joints, our legs, our posture, and our balance, to name just a few things. The Bible talks a lot about walking and running,² and both Testaments call our feet “beautiful”:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns”! (Isaiah 52:7).³

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on February 2, 2020.

² Walking appears 325 times, running 158 times.

³ See also Romans 10:15 and Ephesians 6:15.

Our text this morning involves walking, as I'm sure you noticed. It was a Sunday evening, and two men were walking into the gathering darkness that ended a difficult and perplexing day. They were returning home to the village of Emmaus from the capital city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified the previous Friday.

News had come some hours before that Jesus had been raised from the dead! His tomb was empty. The graveclothes looked as though Jesus had simply evaporated out of them, and several women had given emotional testimony that they had actually seen Him and talked with Him.

It was as unusual then as it would be today to claim that someone had been raised to life out of death, and these two were as skeptical as we would have been. They had understood Jesus to be God's promised Messiah, but His suffering and death had been a huge surprise and a crushing disappointment, and an empty tomb didn't fix that.

These two men were engaged in an energetic conversation about all this when a Stranger overtook them and joined them as they all walked along. The Stranger seemed unaware of the tumult about Jesus, and after the men had explained their surprise and despair about what had happened to Jesus, the Stranger responded, "*How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*" And then, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, the Stranger explained to them what had been foretold about God's Messiah.

The three had now reached Emmaus, and the Stranger acted as though He were going farther, but since it was now dark, the two pressed the Stranger to stay for dinner and to spend the night with them—typical Middle-Eastern hospitality. When they sat down to eat, the Stranger, though He was their guest, took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His hosts. In that moment, they realized that the Stranger was in fact Jesus . . . and in that moment, He disappeared.

The two men looked at each other in shock and finally said, "[It *had* to be Jesus.] *Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*"⁴

And although it was now late in the evening, they got up, grabbed their flashlights (just kidding) and walked quickly back to Jerusalem—about seven miles. When they found the Eleven, they were told, "*It's true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon!*" And the two from Emmaus told what had just happened to them.

This is an amazing story, right up there with the story of the Prodigal Son, and both of these stories we know only because Luke recorded them. He was the only one who did.

⁴ Though this passage only gives a general reference to the promises in the Law and the Prophets, the specific texts in view have been noted throughout Luke. Consider [Isaiah 40](#) and its promise of a forerunner ([Luke 3:4-6](#)), [Isaiah 61](#) and its proclamation and realization of deliverance ([Luke 4:18-19](#)), [Psalm 118](#) and its call to receive one who comes in the Lord's name ([Luke 13:35](#)) and its warning that the rejected stone will be exalted ([Luke 19:38](#)), [Psalm 110](#) and its promise of a shared rule with God and an exaltation to come ([Luke 20:42-43](#)), and [Daniel 7](#) and its picture of the Son of Man coming on the clouds ([Luke 21:27](#)).

Many texts not mentioned here will surface later in Acts: for example, [Joel 2](#) and its promise of the Spirit ([Acts 2:17-21](#)), references about God's promise to Abraham ([Acts 3:25](#)), the declaration of [Psalm 16](#) and a hope for messianic rescue ([Acts 2:25-28](#); [13:35](#)), and [Isaiah 55](#) and the promises to David now available in this new era ([Acts 13:34](#)). No doubt the church learned about such texts from Jesus himself during the time of his ministry and in the period just after his resurrection. This central claim of the faith about fulfillment serves as a guide to understanding God's plan. See also Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

One thing to notice is that **nobody expected a resurrection**, even though we know that Jesus had told them about both His suffering and His resurrection at least three times. And we need to notice that even when a resurrection was reported, the disciples and others were slow to believe it. They were just as skeptical and just as surprised as we would have been. There was no collusion to fake a resurrection, because even those closest to Jesus had thought it was all over now.

You'll remember that on the morning of His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to several women. Later in the day, the first man to whom Jesus appeared seems to have been Peter, which was a Grace-Gift of the First Order, given Peter's failures two nights before.⁵ Wouldn't it have been wonderful to overhear that conversation!?

We don't know who Cleopas was, and we're not given a name for his companion;⁶ but it is crystal clear, even in the darkness of the Emmaus road, that God keeps promises, and that what God has promised, God will do . . . in God's time. The prophets had foretold every bit of what happened.

We don't know why the two didn't recognize Jesus on the road. One would think that His voice would have been a giveaway, even in the dark. He apparently looked and spoke like any other man, and there was nothing about Him on their walk that caused them to suspect His identity. Even in the light of the house, they did not recognize Him until He blessed and broke the bread.

I think the best explanation is that God somehow concealed His identity until the right moment to reveal it, which reminds us that Scripture encourages us to "*not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it*" (Hebrews 13:2).

Scholars disagree about the extent to which what happened at the table in Emmaus was "the Lord's Supper." The language used—"took, blessed, broke, gave"—suggests it, but not all are persuaded. The key thing, I think, is not so much whether this was a "liturgical" moment, but the recognition that Jesus is "the unseen Listener in every conversation and the unseen Guest at every meal."

If we have eyes to see it, there is something holy about sharing an "ordinary" meal, and a number of Jesus' resurrection appearances were associated with meals. In fact, in the very next verses after this morning's text, that's what happened:

³⁶ *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

³⁷ *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.* ³⁸ *He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"* ³⁹ *Look at my hands and my **feet**. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."*

⁴⁰ *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.* ⁴¹ *And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"* ⁴² *They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* ⁴³ *and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

⁵ Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

⁶ One tradition identifies him as an uncle of Jesus, brother of Joseph, and father of Simeon, who became a leader of the Jerusalem church (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11; cf. Ellis, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 894). Cleopas is not the Clopas of [John 19:25](#), for Cleopas is a shortened form of the Greek name Cleopatros (masculine form of Cleopatria), whereas Clopas is a Hebrew/Aramaic name. Some have suggested that perhaps Cleopas was known to Luke's readers in the same way that Alexander and Rufus were known to Mark's (cf. [Mark 15:21](#)). This is purely speculation, and even more speculative is discussion about who the other person was.

⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:36-49).

Jesus was now starting to show up everywhere, which is what He still does today. Jesus is present not just in this room and at this Table. He is present in every room and at every table. If we have eyes to see it, every moment is Holy. We who live “in Christ” live in a Christ-filled world!

And maybe that’s really the important thing for us to take away this morning—that **Jesus walks with us as we walk together**. Let us walk closely and walk well.

In his magnificent “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Dr. King told about a seventy-two year-old woman with whom he had spoken during the Montgomery bus boycott. This woman was walking miles and miles to and from work in order to participate in the boycott, and Dr. King asked her, “Mama, why are you walking like this, walking miles and miles to work? I mean, you’re not even going to benefit much from this new situation yourself.” And she said, “Dr. King, I’m not doing this for myself. I’m doing this for my grandchildren.”

Some of that woman’s kin might even be in this room right now; and that’s why she could also say to him, “**Yes, Dr. King, my feet is tired, but my soul is rested.**”⁷

Walk on, my friends. Walk on!

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963.