

Asking Jesus, Pt. 7
Stay with Us!
Luke 24: 28-35

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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On Easter morning, with flowers on the cross and the stone rolled away in the Garden, I'll admit it's a bit odd to take up an *evening* story. Resurrection fits better with dawn light and a rising sun. But I often forget how hard it was for the disciples to process that the man they saw gruesomely tortured to death on a cross was alive again. It took all day to let in the possibility. So, let's follow once more the five steps of *Asking Jesus*.

1) What's the Question? The request in this story is simply, "Stay with us!" Jesus, evening is at hand and the day is past. Don't journey on. Stop here with us. Eat with us. Take a bed in this home. Stay.



2) Who's Asking? On Easter afternoon, two of Jesus' disciples decided to take the seven mile walk from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. Perhaps they had family there. No doubt they felt the need to get moving after the long hours of that dismal Saturday, that Sabbath day of rest when everything seemed ruined. These two weren't part of the inner circle of twelve. One was named Cleopas. We

don't know the other one's name.

In a walking culture, a lone traveler might come alongside a group. Both for safety and for company. These disciples did not recognize this traveler as Jesus. But Jesus is just who they were talking about. How they had hoped he was the long awaited Redeemer. How he had been found guilty and crucified. How just this morning some women said angels told them that Jesus was alive. That was such an impossible hope that it just confused everything! These were dazed disciples, going over and over traumatic events, trying to make sense of it all.

Jesus took over the conversation. He started talking them through the Scriptures that predicted how the Christ would suffer before entering his glory.

Wouldn't you love to have been part of that conversation? Don't you want to know which Scriptures Jesus mentioned? As they walked, the day grew late. They reached Emmaus and Jesus seemed to be walking further. But these disciples were drawn to him. They didn't want this talk to end. *Stay with us. The day is far spent. We've got room for you. Stay.*



3) The Question within the Question.

Day turns to night every 24 hours. It's so normal. Yet, if you let yourself think about it, evening always stabs you a bit. Another day done. It will never come again. The little death of sleep awaits. Every day turning to night reminds us of all the leave-takings we experience. How fast the years fly. How love slips through our fingers. How everything changes.

The heart cries out, "Wait! Don't go. Stay. Stay awhile. Stay with me."

- Maybe you've said that towards *the end of vacation*. "Let's just stay one more day! Just one more day, I don't want this to end." Have you ever just taken that extra day? It's magical. You savor it. A day of life and love swiped back from the relentless press of work. Ah, the joy of one more day!

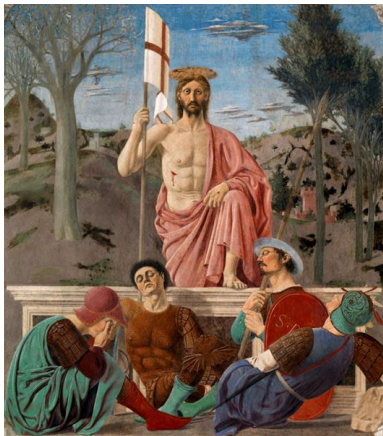
But we've said this lots of other times, too.

- You drop your child for *the first day of first grade*. She turns around and waves to you with a big smile before she goes in. You do your best to smile back, but your eyes are glistening with tears. Your heart cries, "Don't go! Stay my little one. Don't grow up just yet. Stay with me." You say it at first grade. You say it when she goes off to college. You say it when she chooses a path you know will lead to pain. "Please, stay."
- *Children say it*. Maybe the day Mom and Dad took you to the park. They watched you on the swing. Higher and higher. Then you ejected out of the swing with your arms wide open and a shout of joy. They laughed and clapped. You thought, "Stay! Mom and Dad, stop fighting. Stay with me here. I can keep jumping. I can make you laugh. We'll be fine. Just stay."
- There's that day when you go to see your loved one who most days *doesn't even know your name* any more. But one afternoon, he comes back.

Recognition in his eyes. You talk about the family, about Mom and Dad and old times. This window won't stay open long. "Oh stay!" your heart cries.

- If you love someone in the *grip of an addiction*, you've savored the lucid moments. Hope sprang up in you that a corner had been turned and he would come back to sense and sanity. But even as you talked you saw the light go out of his eyes. You saw the fog move in. You hadn't seen him take it. But now he's leaving. "Oh, not again! Please, stay. Don't go into that night. Stay with me."

"Stay with us" is a deep request. We pray it against all kinds of leave-taking. We pray it against the ending of every day. It is the primal call from the depths of what it means to be human. Once God walked with us in the Garden in the cool of the day. Now he does not. Once evening was the best, for God came to us. But we lost that closeness. An inconsolable wound resides in our hearts. It slices and stabs through every kind of leave taking.



4) Jesus' Reply. One of the loveliest traits of Jesus' days among us was his willingness to be interrupted. He stopped for human need. He saw desperate Zacchaeus up in a tree. He paused to speak with the bleeding woman. And he agreed to go into the house with the disciples. *Sure, I'll stay!* Since you asked. I won't leave you. We'll eat together.

Jesus answered their yearning. He answers ours. He gives us his presence. No, Jesus does not end all leave-taking. That's a pain we have to endure until this world is fully remade. And it's all wound together with what it means to love. With what it means to live in a world where people matter, where time passes, where love chosen can also be rejected. Pain and love are, for the time being, inseparable. And Jesus does not spare us from that pain. Not yet.

But what Jesus has done is to *take away the finality of leave-taking*. His resurrection defeated death in all its forms. Jesus rose and now life does not tumble into an abyss of nothingness at our deaths. What is good and true and beautiful, what partakes of faith, hope and love, these things are never lost. Christ Jesus has plundered death. He has recovered the treasure stolen in all our broken leave-takings. He holds them now. We are not to be parted forever. We are not to

be estranged for ever. He has reconciled all things to himself. In Christ, this pain of parting has been overcome with the hope of everlasting life.

In John's Gospel, Jesus spoke to his disciples about his death. He told them how in a little while they would not see him. "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament... You will be sorrowful." Nor did he spare himself the pain of parting. He would not skip death but travel through it. And his disciples would know the pain of that parting. But there would come a turning. "So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn. 16: 20,22).

Jesus coordinated the pain of all our leave-takings with the ultimate plunge into forsakenness and death which he took for us. Jesus coordinated all our hope for restoration and reconciliation with his rising. How profound were his words, "Because I live, you also will live" (Jn. 14: 19). He did not stay dead. He returned to them. His rising is the promise that all the Sunderings and Rendings and Losses will be restored. So Francis Spufford imagined Jesus saying, "Don't be afraid. Far more can be mended than you know." Yes, far more can be mended than you know.



5) Our Response. That Easter evening at supper, Jesus was a guest, not the host. But quite naturally he took up a leadership role, like the father at a family table. Luke tells us that Jesus "took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them" (vs. 30). Can you imagine the feeling of déjà vu these disciples had?

They didn't recognize him as Jesus. But what this stranger did and said seemed so familiar. Like that day when Jesus fed 5000 from five loaves and two fish. He took the bread, blessed, broke and gave. And it never ran out. Like three nights ago in the Upper Room when Jesus blessed, broke and gave the bread and said, "This is my body, which is given for you." Wait a minute! They took the bread from his hands and their eyes were opened. This *is* Jesus! Alive. With us. Real. I'm pretty sure Jesus beamed quite a smile upon them just before he vanished from their sight.

These joyfully stunned disciples said to each other, "Weren't our hearts burning within us as he talked to us on the road and opened to us the Scriptures?"

Weren't you just tingling the whole time we were with him? Didn't you feel like you were just on the edge of something wonderful? The missing piece fit right into the slot. The key to the Scriptures unlocked the deeper meaning in every passage. Jesus is that key. The God who took up flesh and died. The man who rose from the dead never to die again. The Savior who fills the great yearning for love and companionship. The Redeemer who solves the finality of all our leave-takings. Jesus. Alive again and forevermore.

Of course they ran back to Jerusalem, even in the dark. They found the other disciples. Everybody must have talked at once. They corroborated the truth for each other. The Lord is risen indeed and we saw him! Just then Jesus arrived in their midst again. "Peace to you!" he said. And he ate fish with them and talked with them, and all the sorrow vanished. The pain was gone. Jesus lives. And we live in him.

So, hearing this, let me ask you, "Is your heart warmed? Is fire kindling in your spirit? Do you feel like Jesus just might be the key to your heart's longing?" There's a step of faith that carries you across from where you are into an experience of the risen Christ. If there's a spark, would you fan it into flame with faith? I can't persuade you of any of this. But I can bear witness to you of my own experience. He's real. He's risen. And he's here. I know it. But I can't have the experience for you. At the end of the day, when evening is at hand, there comes a moment when each of us has to say for ourselves, "Lord Jesus, stay with us! Make yourself known to me! When I come to take the bread and the cup, make yourself real to me. I will come to offer myself to you. I place my halting, flickering spark of faith in you. Be the key that opens the Scriptures. Be the missing piece that holds me all together. Connect me to you this Easter Day in the breaking of the bread!"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, stay with us! For the hours fly by and we are far from home. Too much breaks. Too many leave. Our grip is fragile and our hope is frail. Stay with us. Be known to us. Open our eyes to see you ever with us. This day, join us to yourself anew in the sharing of the bread and the cup.

Paintings:

Robert Zund, "The Way to Emmaus," 1877, Swiss.

"The Disciples of Emmaus" 6th c. Mosaic, Basilica of St. Apollinaris, Ravenna

Piero della Francesca, "The Resurrection," 1460

Caravaggio, 1606 "Supper at Emmaus"