

Stay With Us
Luke 24: 13-35

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**Easter Sunday, March 27, AD 2016
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

Only Luke recorded this sweet account of two disciples on the road Easter afternoon. They were walking from Jerusalem to a village seven miles west called Emmaus. As people do on a journey, they talked. They went over and over the events of the last few days, and in particular the last few hours. Last Sunday Jesus rode into town to a cheering multitude. Everyone was convinced he was the Messiah. It seemed the kingdom of God was dawning at last. But then Thursday Jesus was arrested. Friday they crucified him. Saturday was total despair. Then this morning the body was gone. Women near hysteria reported visions of angels. They said Jesus was risen from the dead. Other disciples confirmed that the tomb was indeed empty. But no one knew for sure what that meant. Bodies don't rise from the dead. Surely the angels were just talking about something spiritual. Everyone was confused.

And these two had had enough. They were walking away from all these events, out of Jerusalem, toward a tiny village. Whatever was happening, they were leaving it behind. It was all too overwhelming. They had to go. But they still couldn't stop talking about it.

Back and forth they went, rehearsing all the details. A stranger drew up alongside them on the road. He'd come from Jerusalem but seemed clueless about the events that had everyone buzzing. When they told him, the stranger shook his head in disbelief. Not about the rumors of a dead man rising. But about how these disciples of Jesus were missing all the clues. So during that two hour walk, the stranger talked to them about the Scriptures. He showed them passage after passage that pointed to a messiah who would die for his people, then triumph over death and sin. He spoke like someone who not only knew the Scriptures, but had written them himself.

When they reached Emmaus, the stranger made like he was going to continue journeying onward. But now they did not want him to leave them. "Stay with us, for evening is at hand, and the day is far spent." They urged him to remain. So he did. He went inside the home where these men were staying. He sat at table with them. And though he was a guest, at one point he took bread in his hands, blessed the LORD in heaven, broke the bread and gave it to them. In that

moment they realized, “This guy is Jesus! The one who walked with us is Jesus. The one who talked about the Scriptures is Jesus. The one giving us the bread is Jesus. Just like he did last Thursday in the upper room. It’s Jesus. He’s alive! That’s what we were feeling as he talked. Our hearts afire with expectation, the feeling that something wondrous was about to happen, the feeling of being just about to discover the thing you want most. It was Jesus. Alive again.” They recognized him, and then he was gone. Immediately they packed up and headed back to Jerusalem to report. All that was sad had come untrue. Jesus is alive.

This morning we are all on the Emmaus Road. We are walking along the way of a worship service. We are passing through this place that is abuzz with talk about Jesus. The man up front is saying Jesus rose. There’s a replica of a tomb out in the garden and it’s empty. The cross has flowers on it. The songs are declaring: Christ the Lord is risen today. People around us seem to be happy. They are in festive spring clothes. The church makes a big deal about Easter.

For a moment or two, we wonder, “Maybe this has something to do with me. Maybe the guy who got up from the dead has some kind of claim on my life. Is this what I’ve been looking for?” The heart stirs with some anticipation.

But the worship service is passing. The time is flying. We won’t be here long. Meals await us. There will be relatives and maybe egg hunts and basketball and some vacation next week. This service will be concluded. We’ll leave our bulletins in the pews and get on with the next thing. A moment comes and a moment goes. A door opens. We look in, but don’t walk in, and then the door closes and we are on our way. Back to the usual way of coping. The usual methods for silencing the guilt and filling in the loneliness. The usual stream of life that just bears us along.

In some ways, that’s a relief. To get out of church unscathed. Untroubled. I don’t like change. I want to be left alone. But for just a second there is a flicker of excitement. What if? What if knowing Jesus *is* what I’m looking for? An authentic relationship. A deeper connection. To be known at last, yet still loved. To have life, vivid life in my ordinary days. Easter worship burns in the heart with hope.

But the hour is passing. Soon we’ll be out of here. Jesus has arrived, but just as he did in the Emmaus Road account, Jesus makes as if to go on. He doesn’t push to stay. He doesn’t invite himself in. He doesn’t stay if he’s not asked. He is here, right now. But soon the service will end. And he will move on. He’s going on ahead while we go back to ordinary life.

Take a moment to ask your heart if you really want to let him go. Is that what you want? To let him pass by and go on. Another Easter come and gone and nothing really touches me in the depths. Part of me doesn't mind letting him go. I don't want to change. But another part of me cries out, "Wait! Wait. Stay, Jesus. Stay with us. The day is far spent. My life is moving along. Time is flying and evening is coming. Don't go. Come in for dinner. Sit with us some more. Speak to us some more. Stay with us."

You know, he doesn't play hard to get. He won't push. But he doesn't take a lot of fancy persuading. All you have to feel is to want him. All he wants to hear is a sincere invitation. Stay, Lord. Stay here with us.

I am trying to share what I know in my deepest experience to be true. This is the bottom line: *You can connect to the risen Jesus.* You can, indeed, come home to God even as you invite Jesus into the home of your life. The Gospels talk about this lots of ways: as living water, healing forgiveness, eternal life, a festive celebration of love – are all available. Jesus is the means and the way back to God his Father. I have met him through the pages of Scripture. The Word of God sets my heart on fire. But even more intimately, I feel his presence in my heart. I know what it is to be joined to Jesus. He comes to dwell in those who trust in him by sending his Holy Spirit into our hearts. This is a soul-joining, a fellowship, in the deepest levels. It has meant the filling of loneliness, the assuaging of guilt, the thrill of purpose, companionship in suffering, entering a fellowship of compassion for the least and the lost, and the gift of an unflagging hope even in this lost, chaotic world.

I know Jesus because someone told me about him. People who had experienced his living presence passed the gospel of Christ along. And now I am passing this news along to you. This is how it has been from the beginning. This is the way God reconnects us to himself. The first disciples knew the sound of Jesus' voice. They knew his embrace. They saw him alive from the dead. They were the witnesses that Jesus had come from God to reconnect us to God. As they told the story, these disciples discovered that even people who had never seen Jesus face-to-face came to know him in the same deep, transforming way that they did. As the disciples shared Jesus, others were united to him, just as if they, too, had known Jesus in the flesh.

The apostle John said: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our

fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ” (I John 1:3). Distance and time are no barriers. Today, we may be as close to Jesus as were his first followers! We may enter the fellowship – the intimate, loving relationship – that Jesus shares with his Father.

I cannot make you believe that Jesus is the Savior who will reconnect you to God his Father. In fact, you cannot make yourself believe it. *Faith is a gift*. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to awaken us to say “Yes” when we hear the stories of Jesus. *But faith also is a choice*. When the Spirit rouses my heart at hearing of Jesus, I am called to say with my whole heart, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief! Jesus, you are my Savior and the Lord of all. Jesus, you are the way to the Father. Jesus, I believe that your death takes away my sins. Your resurrection opens up eternal life to me. Jesus, I want you to live in me.”

The question, then, at the end of the day, before the service is over and we are swept back into our daily lives, is simply this: Is the Holy Spirit creating faith in you right now? Do you want to be reconnected to God through Jesus? If the Holy Spirit is stirring your spirit, I urge you not to wait another moment. Enter the fellowship. Experience the mystic communion of knowing God the Father through Jesus his Son in the loving bond of the blessed Holy Spirit.

Add your agreement in heart, mind and will to what Christ has done for you and is doing for you. Do so as you partake of Jesus in the broken bread and the shared cup. Say to him, “Lord Jesus stay with me. Come in to the home of my heart. Be known to me in the breaking of the bread.”

When we take communion, we can invite Jesus to come into our hearts. We can invite him to be Lord of our lives. We can invite him to be our Savior. We can invite him to reconnect us with his Father. We can invite him to lead us in the way of loving and living as he did.

All that belongs to Jesus may be ours – his forgiveness, his mercy, his peace, his joy, his love. Don’t let him get away. He’s right here now. Ask him to stay. Don’t wait another second! Invite him in right now. I’m going to give you some words for this, words based on the things Jesus said and did. As you listen to the words, ask Jesus to stay with you. Let these words carry your hearts:

Lord Jesus, stay with me. Come into my heart. I have been the prodigal child and need your acceptance. I have been the judgmental older brother and need your joy. I have been the thirsty woman at the noonday well and I need your living water. I have wounds from the past that need your healing.

I admit that I have sought for good in bad, broken places. I have looked for life amidst what only makes for death. I have tried to hold on to what little I have because I fear that you will not be as good and loving as I need. Forgive me.

I desire eternal life and am willing to give up control of my earthly life to you. Stay with me. Come into my heart. All I have is yours. By faith, I accept that all that you are and have is mine. I receive the cup of your forgiveness because I know you drank the cup of my sin on the cross. I receive the joy of your resurrection life that has overcome all death. Set my heart burning with passion for you. Make me wholeheartedly willing and able from now on to serve you and love you and others all my days. Make me one who will wash the feet of others and care for even the least and the lost. Amen.

If that is indeed your prayer, I urge you to take communion this morning with great anticipation and faith. As soon as possible tell someone who is a Christian about the choice you made. Seek a small group of people with whom you can study Scripture and pray. Read the Bible today and each day. You have begun a great adventure. The Holy Spirit dwells in your heart. You are in Christ, forever joined to him. You belong to the Father and can never be taken from him. Eternal life has begun!