Luke 24:13-35 *Heart Applications: Encountering Jesus (Easter Sunday, 2019)*

***Missed Moments of Grace***In 2007 one of the most famous violinists in the world spent 45 minutes playing incognito at the entrance to a Washington D.C. Metro station during morning rush hour. It was an experiment set up by a Washington Post writer to conduct, quote, “an experiment in context, perception and priorities — as well as an unblinking assessment of public taste: In a banal setting at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?”

So, on January 12, 2007, about a thousand morning commuters passing through the L’Enfant Plaza Station of the subway line in Washington, D.C. were, without publicity, treated to a free mini-concert performed by violin virtuoso Joshua Bell, who played for approximately 45 minutes, performing six classical pieces (two of which were by Bach) on his handcrafted 1713 Stradivarius violin (reportedly valued at $3.5 million). As newspaperman described the crux of the experiment:

Each passerby had a quick choice to make, one familiar to commuters in any urban area where the occasional street performer is part of the cityscape: Do you stop and listen? Do you hurry past with a blend of guilt and irritation, aware of your cupidity but annoyed by the unbidden demand on your time and your wallet? Do you throw in a buck, just to be polite? Does your decision change if he’s really bad? What if he’s really good? Do you have time for beauty? Shouldn’t you? What’s the moral mathematics of the moment?

Three days earlier, Bell had played to a full house at Boston’s Symphony Hall, where fairly good seats went for $100. But on this day he collected just $32.17 for his efforts, contributed by a mere 27 of 1,097 passing travelers. Only seven people stopped to listen, and just one of them recognized the performer.

What about you? Do you think you would have recognized this moment of grace and beauty?

I’ll be the first to admit, I have no idea who Joshua Bell is. I’ve seen video of the experiment, but even now I’m sure I couldn’t pick Joshua Bell out of a line up. I also know very little about classical music, or the violin.

And yet, I’d like to think that one of the best musicians in the world, playing one of the most expensive instruments in the world, performing some of the most time-tested music in our culture, might have gotten my attention. I’d like to think I might have noticed this moment of grace, this in-breaking of beauty.

But if I’m honest, I have to admit I probably would have walked right on by.

If this had been a fictional story—it’s not, it’s true, you can see security footage on YouTube—but if it were a fictional story our English teachers would say that Joshua Bell was a Christ figure: he was displaying grace and beauty into the world, but no one recognized him. No one saw who he was. Because he didn’t look like royalty. He wasn’t what anyone expected.

You can see that in our Bible story this morning as well. The story that the 4th and 5th graders shared with us so well is the first time anybody in the gospel of Luke sees Jesus alive after His resurrection. It’s the first time in Luke’s telling that anybody saw the risen Lord. And yet, nobody recognized Him.

They had this amazing encounter with beauty and grace, and they almost missed it.

***The Unknown Travelling Companion***Let me take you through the story. It’s Luke 24, **starting at verse 13:**

**13**Now that same day [this is Sunday, the first day of the week] two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14**They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

These are two disciples of Jesus. These are two followers of Jesus.

Now, usually, we hear the word “disciples” in the Bible, and we assume we are talking about the 12. We know that Jesus had 12 hand-picked disciples who were His inner circle.

But what we don’t always remember is that there were many other people who were close followers of Jesus, and they were called disciples also. Nobody knows their exact number, somewhere between 72 (cf. Luke 1:1) and 120 (cf, Acts 1:15), but there was a group that were dedicated to Jesus who would have been devastated by His death. These two would be among that group.

We know from a little later that one of these disciples was named Cleopas. We’re not sure who that is, but Luke uses his name like maybe some of his readers will recognize it. So perhaps he became a well-known figure in the early church, or, at the very least, he was still alive when Luke wrote his account and Luke is using his name as a way of saying: “Check with him, he’ll confirm the story.”

We don’t know who the other traveler is. It’s possible that, if the theory about Cleopas being still alive at the time of Luke’s writing is true, that the second traveler had died, and so recording the name was less helpful. Some have speculated that it was Cleopas’s wife. That makes quite a bit of sense. Another theory I read this week suggests that maybe it was Luke himself. That’s a fun theory, but there isn’t much to back it up.

At any rate, these two were in Jerusalem when Jesus died, and they’ve obviously been shaken by His death. They are talking about it as they walk along, when all of a sudden Jesus is walking next to them. **Verse 15:**

**15**As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16**but they were kept from recognizing him.

One of many things that I love about this story is that it’s one where we readers have an advantage over the people actually in the story. We know this is Jesus. Luke tells us right off. We know that Jesus is alive. We’re in on the secret. But the characters in the story don’t know that yet.

In fact, you’ll notice that verse 16 says “they were kept from recognizing him.”

At first glance, that seems strange. Why wouldn’t they recognize Jesus? They’re talking about Him as they walk down the road, for crying out loud. Presumably, they’ve radically altered their lives in the last three years to follow Him. Now He’s striding along next to Him, and they don’t notice? They seem kind of dense.

But, in fact, this seems to be a theme in the resurrection appearances. The first time Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in the gospel of John, she thinks He’s a gardener. Doubting Thomas does not appear to be convinced that it is really Jesus standing in front of him until he sees the scars. Some have speculated that perhaps Jesus’ physical appearance changed at the resurrection. Not so much that He was obviously a supernatural being, but enough that even those closest to Him could not recognize Him.

Pay attention also to the way verse 16 is phrased. “They were kept from recognizing him.” That sounds like maybe the Holy Spirit had something to do with this. Like maybe there was a divine plan for them to not immediately recognize Jesus, like God wanted to teach them, and us, something in this encounter.

But personally, I have my own theory as to why people didn’t immediately recognize the resurrected Lord, and it’s this: He was dead! He was just violently and publicly executed. And most of the people He was now appearing to were eyewitnesses to His death. And these people knew, as well as we do, that dead people don’t come back to life. So it makes perfect sense to me that no matter how much Jesus still looked like Himself, their minds were simply not prepared for the idea that Jesus could now be up and walking and talking. It just doesn’t compute. There must be some other explanation for why this person looks so much like Jesus.

This, by the way, is also a pretty good argument for the truthfulness of the resurrection story. If you believe that the disciples made up the story of Jesus coming back to life, you have to ask yourself why they consistently portray themselves as so slow to believe. If you were going to make up a story in which you wanted other people to believe that Jesus came back to life, wouldn’t you want the people in your story to be a little quicker on the uptake? If you want other people to believe the impossible, shouldn’t the people in the story be more prepared to believe as well?

At any rate, Jesus now engages them in conversation. **Verse 17:**

**17**He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast.

I never noticed this before until this week. This question stops them in their tracks.

“What are you discussing?”

They stood still.  Their faces were downcast.  These two people were so dejected, so sad, so tormented by the death of Jesus, that they had to stop.  **Verse 18:**

**18**One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

Where have you been? This traveler is obviously coming from Jerusalem also. How can anyone have been in Jerusalem the last few days and not know about what happened? Like the kids said in their presentation: Have you been living under a rock?

There’s something almost playful about Jesus in this story. I don’t think He’s being deliberately deceitful. He’s just not in any hurry to reveal Himself. He’s curious as to how these people, whom He obviously cares very much about, interpret the things that have happened. **Verse 19:**

**19**“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. **20**The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21**but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22**In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning **23**but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24**Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

I never noticed this before this week, either, but here is an almost perfect explanation of the gospel. These two don’t know it, but they are now sharing the good news about Jesus, and they are sharing it with Jesus Himself.

Notice:

* Jesus “was a prophet, powerful in word and deed.” Jesus was sent from God the Father to teach us truth
* But he was “sentenced to death, and they crucified him.” Jesus died on the cross for our sins.
* What’s more, “It is the third day” and the tomb is empty. Jesus has been resurrected.

They give a near perfect explanation of Jesus’ story. The only problem is: they don’t believe that last part yet. They are not ready to believe that Jesus is alive.

And so, they sound hopeless.

“We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. But Messiahs don’t die.

There’s a rumor that He is alive again. But “they did not see Jesus.”

They were hopeless.

***The World’s Greatest Bible Study***So now Jesus, without blowing His cover, reveals Himself in a different way. **Verse 25:**

**25**He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26**Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” **27**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

I read several sermons this week that called this “The Greatest Bible Study in History.” Can you imagine this? Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, just recently resurrected from the dead, takes these two hopeless and devasted disciples on a guided tour of the entire Bible written so far, and He points out how it is all about Him.

This is the story of the Messiah from the Old Testament. That’s what it means when it says “Moses and all the Prophets.”

Do me a favor. If you’ve got a Bible, turn in it to the Table of Contents. Or grab one from the pew back in front of you. Open up to the Table of Contents. You’ll notice that the Bible has two main sections: the Old Testament, which is the Bible at the time of Jesus, and the New Testament, which is what gets written after Jesus.

And the Old Testament is usually divided into three main sections. There’s the first five books, which are known as the books of Moses. Then there are a bunch of history books and poetry, usually known as the Writings. And then there a bunch of Prophets, basically from Isaiah through Malachi.

So, at the time of Jesus, the Bible has these 39 books, and Jesus says they are all about Him. More specifically, they are all about how the Messiah will suffer and then be glorified, just like what has just happened to Him.

Any one of those books, Jesus is saying, you can open it up and learn about Him.

Open the first few pages of Genesis and read about the Garden of Eden, and you’ll learn about a coming seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. That’s Jesus. Turn to the book of Exodus, and you’ll find the story of Jesus foreshadowed in the Passover lamb and the Red Sea Rescue. Read the history of the kings in 1st and 2nd Samuel and the books of Kings and Chronicles, and you’ll see all kinds of hints about a King who will be far greater than King David. Open up Isaiah, and you’ll read about a suffering servant who bears the iniquity of us all.

And on and on and on.

We don’t know what Bible passages Jesus talked about for certain—it was a seven-mile walk, so they didn’t cover everything—but clearly He left an impression.

I’ve mentioned *The Jesus Storybook Bible* several times in the last few years. On Thursday night, when we did our prayer stations, we used *The Jesus Storybook Bible* to tell the story of the Passion. I really love this book. And it’s got a great tagline. It says: “Every story whispers his name.” Every story in the Bible, ultimately, is about Jesus.

And that’s exactly what Jesus is showing these travelers on the road to Emmaus. Every story whispers his name. Every book listed on your Table of Contents there is ultimately about Jesus.

***At the Table***So now Cleopas and his companion have encountered Jesus in the Scriptures. But they still don’t recognize that it is Him walking alongside of them.

When they get to Emmaus, however, they don’t want this conversation to end. **Verse 28:**

**28**As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. **29**But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

This is good Middle Eastern hospitality. Jesus does not presume on their generosity, so when they reach the village He makes like He is going to go on further. But they insist that He should stay. **Verse 30:**

**30**When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31**Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

A couple of things here: for one, Jesus assumes the role of host. That’s kind of unusual. It’s not His house. He’s a guest. But He’s the one blessing the bread. He’s the one distributing it.

And the other thing is the language. “He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.” That series of four verbs--took, gave thanks, broke, and gave—is used two other times in the book of Luke. In Luke 9:16, when Jesus feeds five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, He takes, gives thanks, breaks the bread, and gives it to His disciples. And then, again, in Luke 22:19, at the Last Supper, He does exactly the same thing: “He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them.”

Now, I’m not saying that this meal at Emmaus is supposed to be a re-creation of the Last Supper; but there is clearly a connection here. I’m guessing that Jesus had served as the host at many meals his followers enjoyed together. And I’m also guessing that this pattern was something Jesus did every time. He took the bread. He gave thanks for it. He broke it. And He gave it to them. I’m guessing this is something Jesus did so often that those actions were distinctively His own.

So much so that when He does them now, at this table in Emmaus, things click into place for these two disciples. Instantly, their eyes are opened, and they recognize Him. Jesus really is alive!

They saw Him with their own eyes.  They got it.

The Bible is true.
The promises are fulfilled.
Jesus is the Messiah.

Messiahs do die.  But this one also comes back to life! **Verse 32:**

**32**They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

I love that phrase: “were not our hearts burning within us.” It’s like they are saying: “Oh, now I get it! That feeling I had deep inside when we were talking about the Scriptures, it makes sense now.” It’s like the light bulb has gone on. They can make sense of the way it felt to be walking with Jesus. It’s a feeling of being with Jesus.

And it was enough to get these folks who just walked 7 miles to walk 7 miles back!  **Verse 33:**

**33**They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34**and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” **35**Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

I love the way these verse run together. These two run to Jerusalem and before they can tell the others what happened to them, the Eleven have to tell them what’s been happening in Jerusalem.

“It is true! The Lord is risen!”

Jesus really got around that first day: He appeared to Mary Magdalen in the garden. He appeared to Simon. He walked with Cleopas and friend to Emmaus. And, in the very next verse, He’s going to appear right here in this very meeting.

But we’ll end our story here.

***How Are You Going to Encounter Jesus?***And that brings me to the question, the same one I asked at the beginning about the violinist in the train station: Do you think you would have recognized this moment of grace and beauty? **Do you think you would have recognized Jesus?**

I’d like to think that I would have. I’d like to think that I would have felt my heart burning within me. I’d like to think that I would have recognized my Risen Lord and Savior.

But I don’t know. I don’t know that I would have done any better than Cleopas and his companion.

This I do know, however. I want to encounter Jesus. I want to feel my heart burning within me. I want to spend time walking with the one who gave His life for me, and then conquered the grave.

The last several weeks we’ve been doing a series we called Heart Applications. It was a series about the different ways that we can encounter Jesus. Different styles for spending time with Him.

If you weren’t with us for the last few weeks, let me give you a quick recap: We said that not everybody’s heart is wired the same.

* Some of us prefer Ritual and repetition. We find that we connect with God best in the rhythm of written prayers and repeated routines.
* Some of us find that we meet with God best in Nature. We see God in the beauty of Creation.
* Some of us need Solitude. We need to eliminate distractions and meet with God in the quiet.
* Some of us are wired for Action. We find that we can love God best when we are loving others.
* Some of us are drawn to Study. We seek to love God with our minds, and we delight in learning new things in His Word.
* And some of us are built for Celebration. We encounter God in groups of people, with singing and praise.

And one of the points of the series was that if some of these styles don’t fit you, you don’t need to feel bad. Just because some people connect to God in a certain way, doesn’t mean that you have to. The idea is to identify the Heart Application that most helps you connect with God.

But here’s the thing: once you identify your Heart Application, you have to do something about it. It’s not enough to say: “Well, I don’t really experience God in Study… Or I don’t get much out of Celebration…” That’s not an excuse for not meeting with God.

Rather, once you identify a preferred Heart Application, you need a plan for regularly using it. You have to use that Heart App to connect with God.

So here’s my other question for you: **What’s your plan for encountering Jesus?**

When you came in here this morning, you were given an envelope with a card in it. And that card gives you space for writing down a plan for encountering Jesus. And here’s what we’re going to do…

We’re going to invite you to write down a plan for encountering Jesus. And then, because we know what it’s like to make a commitment and then forget about it later, we’re going to invite you to put the card back in the envelope, and then put your name and address on it. You can go ahead and seal up the envelope. Nobody else is going to look at what you wrote. This is between you and God.

But if you want, you can put your address on that envelope and then you can put the envelope in the baskets as you leave. And we’ll collect them, and we’ll put stamps on them, and we’ll hold onto them for 6 weeks. And then, on Monday, June 3, we’ll drop them all in the mail. We’ll do our part to help the U.S. Postal Service, and you’ll get your card back as a reminder of the commitment you made today.

So, what about it? What’s your plan for encountering Jesus? If you were a part of our Heart Application series, then maybe you want to write something down in keeping with your Heart App. Ritual, Nature, Solitude, Action, Study, Celebration.

And even if that language is new to you, and you don’t know much about those six words, you can still think about what makes your heart burn within you with the presence of Jesus. Maybe you need to:

* Buy a devotional or prayer book and commit to using it every morning…
* Find a favorite park or trail and make a point visiting with Jesus while you enjoy His creation…
* Set a time every day when you can be alone with God…
* Volunteer to serve on a work trip…
* Join a Bible Study…
* Or commit to go to a conference where you can be energized in your faith.

The plans for encountering Jesus will be as different as the many people present in this room. But let me urge you to write something down. Make a plan.

Because here’s what I know: Jesus is alive! It was Him walking along that road to Emmaus. He came back from the grave that first Easter Sunday, and He’s still alive and at large in the world today.

And He wants to meet with you. He wants to make your heart burn within you. He wants you to recognize Him.

What’s your plan for encountering Jesus?