



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

JESUS WALKS

*Jeff Peabody
New Day Church
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Twelve billion jelly beans.

That's how many beans candy manufacturers produced for Easter this year. They aren't making them for me, because I'm not a big jelly bean fan. My personal favorite Easter candy is the Cadbury Egg, which also sells pretty well. Apparently, people buy enough of those each year that if you put them end to end, the line of eggs would go for 12,000 miles. That's almost halfway around the earth. I don't know what's more disturbing: that we eat that much chocolate or that somebody actually took the time to calculate that statistic.

Now you could make a case that candy and Easter eggs and ham and new clothes are a distraction from what the day is really about, but I say you can't make this party big enough. You can't hang too many streamers or go overboard on the sweets or spend too much on Easter baskets because NOTHING in the year deserves to be celebrated more and in a bigger way than the resurrection of Jesus. It's the single most life changing event in history and a few billion jelly beans aren't nearly enough to do it justice. There's not enough candy, there aren't enough words, there aren't big enough emotions to adequately celebrate what happened that Sunday morning so long ago.

Really – can you think of a more joyful reason to have a party than life winning over death? The idea that God raised Jesus after he had died is ridiculously hopeful. It's preposterous. It's audacious. It defies everything we know about death. Death is nothing if not permanent.

And yet Christianity bets the farm on the resurrection being true. Only something that big could explain what caused the first disciples to act the way they did in the years following Christ's crucifixion. They risked and often lost their own lives because they were so committed to the claim that Jesus rose again..

It made the impossible possible. Not only did God raise Jesus, but his resurrection became our hope of resurrection. What he did paved the way for everybody to have new life and forgiveness and hope.

Sometimes I wish I was a different Mr. Peabody. Remember the one from the cartoon – Mr. Peabody and his boy Sherman? He had that cool “Wayback” machine and they would travel through time to all different points in history. I wish I could borrow that machine to go way back to that first Sunday and be there with the disciples to see the empty tomb. Watching all the events unfold, getting to see Jesus in person for myself.

It seems like doing that would really make faith easier. Seeing is believing, and all that firsthand data seems like it would really solidify things in your mind. But the truth is, even the people who were on the scene that first Easter had trouble taking it in. The eyewitnesses could hardly process what they were seeing. There were no tools in the toolbox for making sense of that one. The resurrection took faith even for them.

One theologian has said that faith is reason gone courageous. I like that. Facts are important, but the facts in themselves will never be enough to satisfy in a situation like this. You have to have the courage to go where the facts lead.

The story I’d like to look at with you this morning is the story of two ordinary guys who were trying to figure it all out. I like them because they’re just average. They weren’t part of the inner circle of 12 disciples. They weren’t the women who were first to the tomb. They were just regular people facing the same kinds of issues we all face as we try to make sense of Jesus’ death and resurrection. And something remarkable happened that changed their lives forever.

Luke 24:13-35

That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem.

By same day Luke means Sunday, the very day Jesus first walked out of the tomb. You couldn’t get much closer to the main event. We don’t know why these two had left town. Maybe the stress of it all was too much. Maybe they were headed home. Maybe they just needed a break. In any case they’re leaving the intense emotional situation behind. They’re not joining any search parties to find the body.

We talked last week about how Jesus was so focused on getting to Jerusalem, and now these two are just as eager to head in the opposite direction and put some distance between themselves and that place.

They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

The word there is literally that their eyes were held, as if God was putting a hand over them to prevent them from recognizing Jesus. We know from Mark that something about Jesus looked different after the resurrection. The writers can’t seem to quite find the right words for it. He still has a physical body, but it has changed in appearance and what it

can do. As far as the two travelers know, he's just another pilgrim headed home after the Passover.

He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend.

Have you ever had a really tough day and had somebody come up and say, "Hey! How's it going?" in a totally cheery voice, and you hardly know where to begin, or if you even want to bother trying? These two were stopped in their tracks by Jesus and just looked pitiful standing there. Everything was so raw that they had to decide whether or not they even had the energy to bring somebody new up to speed.

Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?"

He said, "What has happened?"

They said, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus."

Kind of ironic, isn't it? Here' they're the ones not seeing Jesus. He's standing right in front of them, and they have no idea.

Then he said to them, "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

Back and forth they talked. "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"

They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up — Simon saw him!"

Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

For as long as the Bible has been around and as much as it has been read, it's still an incredibly surprising book. The resurrection is a surprise. The disciple's reaction is a surprise. But I think one of the most surprising surprises is how Jesus reveals himself to people after he rose from the dead.

If I were Jesus, I would have done things all differently. Say these same two guys are walking down the road and I see them. I know them well. I can tell how sad and depressed they are. All I would want to do is run up behind them, tap them on the shoulders and say "Hey guys! Look! It's me!!! I'm alive!"

NPR regularly features a program called Story Corps, where typical Americans share something of their own life. One couple, Keith and Grete Meerholz, told about their memories of September 11, 2001. Keith was on an express elevator to his office on the 100th floor of the World Trade Center when the first plane hit. Here's how they recall that day.

[audio clip]

You can hear in her voice all the emotion that goes along with even the prospect of losing someone you love and playing through worst case scenarios. She was distraught. And her husband's first instinct was to call her and reassure her that he had miraculously made it out. It would have seemed callous and unloving of him if he HADN'T called her immediately.

Now think of those disciples who not only were imagining worst case scenarios – they had seen it all with their own eyes. They knew what happened to Jesus. They saw firsthand the effects of the beatings and the excruciating suffocation on the cross and the stabbing afterwards with the spear. They saw the body taken down and buried. Their grief wasn't just in their heads – it was real. Their friend and leader was gone and they were traumatized by it because it had all been so horrible.

So if you were Jesus, having just come back from the dead, wouldn't you want to immediately console these people, wrap your arms around them and tell them everything is okay? That's the natural human instinct. But it's not where the Lord goes, which is why I say it's the most surprising surprise.

Authors Chip and Dan Heath talk about how we physically react to surprise, and they say this about our faces when we're surprised.

"When our brows go up, it widens our eyes and gives us a broader field of vision--the Surprise brow is our body's way of forcing us to see more."

That's exactly what Jesus is doing, spiritually speaking. He uses the element of surprise to open our spiritual eyes a little wider and help us see more. We learn more from him not doing what's expected, because it forces us to sit up and pay attention.

Why wouldn't he shout to the whole world, "I'M ALIVE, PEOPLE!" Why wouldn't he walk back to the temple, let the whole world see him and settle this matter once and for all about whether or not the resurrection is real? Why not let his enemies get a good look as well as his friends so everyone is forced to acknowledge him? That's what everybody seemed to want.

Samuel Rothafel, a building designer from the early 1900s, once said, "Giving people what they want is fundamentally and disastrously wrong. The people don't know what they want. Give them something better."

Physical sightings sound ideal, but Jesus did something better. He knew that the generation witnessing his resurrection would soon die off, and no matter how many people claimed to see it, doubts would plague future generations, because there was no way for them to be there. So instead of focusing his energy on physical proof that he was alive, Jesus began interacting with those first followers much the same way he would with all Christians down through history. There was a pattern born in the way he came to those people on the road to Emmaus that can still be seen in how he encounters you and me. Let's go back and take a closer look at their interactions.

They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them.

Here are two individuals who aren't currently looking for Jesus. They're not searching the tomb for clues or scouring the neighborhood for him. They're leaving the scene. They are just hurting, possibly a little angry and busy at the same time, trying to get to their next destination. Jesus still finds them. He first comes in somewhat of a disguise. I think that's true for us as well, because **He shows up as a stranger.**

Jesus walked with them long before they recognize it, and Jesus walks here with us long before we know it either. He approaches us in ways that we aren't even aware. Like those two on the road, we may not even actively be looking for him. We may just be hurting and busy the way they were. But he still shows up.

So what if we want to see him? Not in a physical sense, but what if we want to be aware that he's involved in our lives? Where do we look for him? If we take this story as an example, we look for him in **conversations and company.**

Although the two followers on the road weren't literally looking for Jesus, they were talking about him and all the events they didn't understand. They were trying to make

sense of who he was and what had happened to him. Their conversation opened the door for Jesus to enter in.

It's the first example we have of what Jesus had told his disciples before his death:

Matthew 18:20

And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there.

If you're hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus, put yourself where you're most likely to see him. Strike up a conversation with somebody who knows him. Think back to threads of dialogue you have had with other people about Jesus. Nearly everyone who chooses to put their faith in Jesus comes into contact with him on the arm of a friend. Rarely will somebody find the answers on their own, just by reading books or getting some flash of inspiration. Jesus is hidden in conversations. He's waiting to be discovered in the company we keep, and he promises to be right there when he's the topic, whether we recognize him at first or not.

I don't know why he sometimes makes himself harder to see, but does it really matter? What's more important is to know that he IS walking with me, even when I can't see it.

Jesus shows his character and style in the way he enters that conversation:

He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend.

Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?"

He said, "What has happened?"

Rather than jumping in and blurting out, "I'm alive," Jesus chooses a different starting point. He asks about where they're at. He wants to know what's going on with them first. What he shows in that is that **He hears our heart.**

I've mentioned before that I'm a lousy listener. I'm a great answerer, but I'm a terrible listener. So sometimes when somebody is telling me something, I'm already formulating what I'm going to say back. They might as well stop what they're saying in mid-sentence, because I've already moved on to the much more fascinating topic of what I have to say. Do you ever do that? I apologize if you've been on the other end of one of those conversations with me. Not a nice thing to learn about yourself, so I've really had to work at staying in the moment and giving people my full attention.

Jesus is a great listener. Look at his self control: even though he has the best news in the world to tell them, he waits and begins by listening to their story. Jesus deeply interested

in your life. He cares about your circumstances. He may be the only person who truly understands where you're coming from and who meets you in that moment.

It's a good lesson for those of us who want to share Jesus with other friends and family. We're anxious to give an information dump and blurt out "Believe in him because he's alive," when really it's far more important to enter in to that person's situation and hear their heart first. That's what Jesus does.

What catches us a little off-guard is then how Jesus responds to the story these two tell. "You big dummies! You lunkheads! You're missing the whole point." It doesn't sound all that compassionate. We have some friend whose toddler got his vocabulary from his big brothers. You'd walk in and see this cute baby with these big blue eyes. He'd look at you and smile and say, "You goofball!" It caught you off guard

That's what Jesus does here, but he can get away with it because he cares about them enough that he doesn't let untruth slide. And then he sets about correcting their perspective.

Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

The two disciples had their facts straight. They knew Jesus had been a teacher. They remembered the miracles. They knew what the priests had done and how the Romans had killed him. They even got so far as to know the tomb was empty. They had their information correct. They just didn't know how to interpret the facts.

So when Jesus steps in, **He reshapes the story.** What these people saw as a defeat, Jesus saw as God's whole purpose. Where Jesus was a victim in their minds, in reality he had become the conqueror.

Here's where I think we catch a bit of why Jesus didn't come right out and announce that he was alive. If he had, all the disciples would be able to think about was that Jesus could pick right back up where he left. The crucifixion would have seemed like one bad dream, a speed bump. The disciples would just say, "Glad that's over. Now we can get on with the mission."

But his death WAS the mission. Christ said to them,

"Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?"

His main point in that conversation was not to prove he was alive but to show why it was necessary for him to die in the first place. The real work of salvation happened on the cross.

When I was young, my dad had a big wood working shop in our basement. We lived in an older house with old wiring, and when my dad would get one of his big saws going at full speed, it would trip a breaker and the power would go out and need to be reset.

When I think of the death of the Son of God, I think of this massive power surge that tripped a breaker and the whole universe had to be reset. Jesus dying on the cross changed everything in our relationship with God. All the sin before and all the sin since was dealt with once and for all that day. It was the whole reason Jesus came, and if he didn't help the disciples process his death, if he only focused on the fact that he was alive, they would continue to miss the point of his mission.

This was not a survival story – Jesus was alive AFTER being dead. It was a resurrection, not a resuscitation. The death in the middle mattered.

We'd always rather jump to the resurrection, the happy ending. Jesus says there is purpose in the suffering, both in his story and in ours. We see the events and facts of our own lives and we know them pretty well, but we often get the interpretation wrong. Jesus says there's a bigger story. Our lives have meaning and value, and he reshapes our story as he tells it, giving us clearer perspective on why we're here and who he is.

Those friends listening to him on the road are eating it up. They don't want the conversation to end.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them.

What a strange thing for Luke to say – that Jesus acted like he was going further. What did he do that made them think that? Where was he planning to walk to? We're not told any of that. The point seems to be that he only continued the conversation with his friends when they requested that he do so.

Imagine if they hadn't done that. They would have gone to dinner by themselves and said, "Wasn't that guy interesting? He sure knew his Bible." And that would have been the end of it. It was only after they had asked Jesus in for dinner that they finally saw who he was. Then their eyes were opened.

Here's the thing about Jesus: **He waits for our invitation.**

If we're wanting Christ to reveal more of himself to us, sometimes we have to ask him to do just that. We tend to think the reverse is true: I'll wait to make up my mind about Jesus until I know more about him. But the real knowing only comes after we've made the decision to pursue him further.

Christ won't force himself on anybody. He's available. He's closer than we think. But he doesn't violate our free will. You've heard the verse often where he says, "Behold I

stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” But he waits for that invitation.

If you’re full of questions this morning about Jesus’ resurrection and what it means, don’t let the questions become your excuse for not inviting him into your life. Make them the reason to invite him, because it’s only in doing that that you’ll really begin to know him. Keeping Jesus at arms length won’t give you the answers you’re looking for. The Message translation of the Bible puts it this way in the book of James:

James 4:8

Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time.

Imagine being there that night in Emmaus. These people have convinced Jesus to stay for supper. So they set about getting it ready. They put out the dishes and the silverware. They see what leftovers they’ve got on hand. At least they’ve got plenty of bread, so they put that on the table. Finally they sit down, ready to eat.

But a strange thing happens. Their guest says, “May I?” and he takes on the role of the host. They are now his guests. And there’s that bread. He looks at it. He picks it up. He prays over it. Then he breaks it, stretches out his hands and gives some to his two friends. This is for you. This is for you.

In that moment, they recognize two things immediately. First was his action. They’ve seen this exact move right before he died. He had gathered his friends for his last Passover, and he’d done the same thing with the bread there, saying it represented his body. The action was unmistakable.

But they also saw his hands. Those hands that had the fresh nail scars so visible. For as different as Jesus must have looked, his wounds stayed the same. And like a bolt from the blue it hit them who Christ was and what he had done and what he was saying. He was a revelation sitting in front of them.

Christ shows us his hands. Connecting his work with what he’s offering us right now – that’s where he’s most visible. He’s sitting here, holding that broken bread out to us, saying this is for you. This is for you. There’s an intersection between what he did and our lives, and that’s the cross.

Knowing the living Jesus is never theoretical. It’s an intensely personal encounter with the Jesus who died. When I allow him to feed me that broken bread, I become whole. It’s when I see those beautiful scars he wears for me that my own scars start to dissolve. As Isaiah says, it’s by his wounds we are healed. There’s life in what he’s offering me – life that comes through a death. And that is what resurrection is all about. We get to know Christ is alive not just as fact but as experience.

It takes humility to be fed, to have someone else care for us in that most basic of ways. But it is only as we can set aside our pride and take what Christ hands us that we see who he really is.

It was an intense burst of revelation at that table in Emmaus. Then Jesus vanished into the night. But that brief moment of absolute clarity was profound and powerful.

They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem.

He turns us around

Here it is, late evening by now. They just got into town after a long walk, but they can't wait. Their world has been transformed and all they want to do is get back to Jerusalem. Christ has turned them around and given them new motivation to get back in the game spiritually.

Christ picks us up and heads us in a new direction. This is what he does over and over again. If you want proof of the resurrection, you don't need to look any further. All through history there are countless examples of followers of Christ who he picked up and turned around. Giving them courage to face lions. Giving them wisdom to speak before kings. Giving them freedom from prisons both physical and spiritual. Turning them around from despair to hope. Exchanging fear for peace. Bringing forgiveness where there was hate. Replacing sickness with health. Giving joy where there was heartache. Setting hearts on fire that have been snuffed out.

That's what resurrection is – a complete opposite of what should be. It's the ultimate turn around. That's the reason Christ can offer us so much. Jesus walks beside us, each step of the way, and each time we fall, he picks us back up. Each time we head backwards, he's there to turn us around again.

Oh, I need that Jesus. Every day I need his life changing power to light a flame in my heart.

The question for me this morning is not "Did the resurrection really happen?" The more pressing question is, "Do I want to see the risen Jesus?" Am I ready for that kind of encounter, to walk with him and let him reshape my story? Am I ready to invite him in and let him feed my soul?

If I am, where am I going to look for him? God has said that those who seek him find him. Where am I going to look?

We may not have a Wayback machine that lets us look in the empty grave. Jesus may not always be recognizable. But make no mistake: we can know he's alive. His word speaks it. His creation shouts it. His Spirit confirms it. His power demonstrates it. His people experience it. And someday, we're all going to celebrate it with him face to face in the biggest Easter celebration of all. And I can't wait.