

**Luke 24: 13-35**  
**March 31, 2013**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**  
**Easter Sunday**

For years I kept my distance from this story because it seemed too much like a scene from the comic books of my childhood. He disappeared from their sight. *Shazzam!* In deed the whole story of Easter with earthquakes and the dead walking around and sudden appearances of this man who had been crucified now appearing seemed incredible. Don't get me wrong. I *liked* those stories. I loved people with superhuman powers: "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." I yearned for a world of super heroes who defended the good and brought evil to justice. Jesus was a kind of super hero to me. Yet the day came when I, foolishly, gave away my comic book collection, including my first edition GI Joe comic. To quote the apostle Paul, I was done with "childish things." Jesus was just one more super hero who fell by the wayside in my journey toward adulthood.

My faith in Superman, Batman, the Flash, Aqua Man and, my favorite, Elongated Man, never came back. But Jesus was different. I thought I had left Jesus behind; but he always seemed to be around. He was a shadowy figure in my shadowy life. He was different from the Jesus of my childhood. He was not the great champion of right over wrong. He was not the magic man who would like a fantasy parent "make it all better." He was a silent presence. He was patiently waiting for me to find him and invite him into my life—*not as a super hero*; but as a companion in life and true friend.

I see this now looking back over many years. I now see that Jesus never left me. He was always by my side, listening to me, agonizing when I followed paths destructive to myself and others; pulling me to safety when I could not save myself; celebrating when I got it right; leading me down a path which has led to times of joyful recognition and the peace that comes from knowing I am safe in God's heart.

But for most of the journey I did not recognize him. I recognized wonderful college friends who took me to church, doctors who found medication for depression, professors who gave me credit for work started and not completed, and one in particular who on a final exam said, "You have a gift for theology. I hope you will continue your studies." The list of people and circumstances which I now recognize as Jesus walking with me are countless.

The point is that he was there; *but my eyes were kept from recognizing him*. What made the difference?

The first was my senior year at seminary. At an Ash Wednesday service with MJ (then) Henderson we reached the point where the pastor took bread and broke it and said, "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ is broken *for you*." Up until that point I had believed this to be some kind of generic offering—not meant for anyone in particular. Until that point it had never occurred to me that Jesus' body was broken and his blood was shed *for me*, an insignificant ruffled soul named Stewart. Yet there I was and for the first time felt Jesus' arms reaching out to me. *And my eyes were opened and I recognized him! And he vanished from my sight.*

Friends, it is so true that these moments of recognizing Jesus in the midst of life are fleeting. *But they are real!* And if you do not dismiss them dare to believe that you actually saw what you saw and experienced what you experienced, *you will see him again!*

Another “sighting” happened several years ago when I was in Jerusalem in a place regarded by some, myself included, as the actual location of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial and resurrection. We were celebrating the Lord’s Supper and I prayed that Jesus be known to me in the breaking of the bread. The leader of our tour took a piece of matzo bread. When he broke it I felt more than heard a loud *crack* and a wave of energy flowed through me. It was lucky I was seated as I am sure I would have collapsed. But the feeling and the sense of recognition passed. He vanished from my sight and ordinary life resumed.

Friends I do not believe that we are meant to have continuous revelations of Jesus. They would overpower us. Instead we are meant to learn trust that he is with us and to allow that spiritual power to slowly become more and more who *we* are. The point is not to *see Jesus*. The point is more and more to *be like* Jesus, that is, to be a vehicle through whom people experience not you, or me, but *Jesus*. In my experience this happens not by working hard *trying* to be a good person, or a *good Christian*, which I suspect is very much the same thing. We see Jesus and we become Jesus-like when we stop *trying* and simply live trusting in his daily presence with us.

Which leads me to the third “experience:” It really is no single experience but a long journey of experience with the story of God which we call the Bible. You will recall that this morning’s scripture began with two of the larger community of Jesus’ disciples engrossed in the dramatic and *traumatic* events of the previous three days. They are grief stricken. They are rehearsing the events as we do when something upsetting happens to us. We go back to it. We try to make sense of it. Soon it is not the events themselves we are repeating it is our sense of disorientation—that sense that a world where everything fit into place has been blown apart. .

Then this man comes along side of them and begins asking questions. Then he does something so simple and important that it is only now that I am appreciating it. He ties their experience into the story of God. In the story of God everything has a place. In the story of God the entire spectrum of human experience is embraced and understood. In the story of God, there is no such thing as “good” experiences and “bad” experiences. In the story of God there is only a love that yearns for healing, wholeness and a desire that all creation find their rightful place in God. Thus when we find ourselves in *God’s* story we find our rightful place. We stop striving and grasping. We begin a life of receiving God’s gift of life and love and it becomes our chief joy simply to receive and share that love.

It is in the context of God’s story that Jesus can exclaim to the two disciples, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should *suffer* these things and enter into his glory?” Take a moment and let this sink in. What keeps you and me from recognizing Jesus? Is it not the experience of suffering? It may not be our personal suffering; it may be that of a loved one or of suffering in the world. But how often do we wonder when we suffer or see someone else suffer, “Where is God?” In the violence of the world, the oppression, the disease, the ignorance and greed and lust for power, *where is God? Where is Jesus?*

Yet when we hear Jesus say, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer and then enter into his glory?” we recognize that suffering is a crucial part of *God’s story*. And if suffering is an essential part of God’s story then where is the most reliable place we are likely to find him? Where has God made it so clear that Jesus is? In suffering. But not in suffering for its own sake. Jesus is in the suffering to redeem it; to bring it into the grand story of God’s reconciling the entire world to himself.

And this is the Good News of Easter. When we recognize that our lives are part of God's story—even and especially our suffering, our stories are folded into the Greatest Story, a story which will never end and which tells of the victory of life over death, love over selfishness, hope over despair and most of all, joy over everything. Amen.