

“WHAT THINGS?”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE
(24:13-35) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC
ON APRIL 26, 2020-----THE “WALK TO EMMAUS”**

EVERY NOW AND THEN, WHEN I’M FEELING
OVERWHELMED, AND I’M NOT THINKING
STRAIGHT, I STOP AND ASK MYSELF, “IS ALL
THIS REALLY GOING TO MATTER IN TEN YEARS?
HOW ABOUT FIVE? HOW ABOUT NEXT YEAR?
HOW ABOUT NEXT WEEK?” NINE TIMES OUT OF
TEN, THIS SIMPLE EXERCISE IN SEPARATING THE
MOST IMPORTANT FROM THE NOT-SO-
IMPORTANT GETS ME BACK ON TRACK AND I
CAN REFOCUS ON THE THINGS THAT ARE MOST
IMPORTANT.

AND JUST WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT ARE
MOST IMPORTANT THINGS?-----COVID-19 AND
THE WORLD THAT WE ARE NOW LIVING IN HAS
CERTAINLY CAUSED ME TO PAUSE ---MEDITATE--
--AND REFLECT ON THIS VERY DIFFICULT AND
CHALLENGING QUESTION

AND EVEN IN THOSE DAYS AND TIMES THAT WE
CALL “NORMAL” THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS
IN OUR WORLD THAT CONSPIRE TO DISTRACT
US, TO KEEP US FROM BEING MINDFULLY
AWARE AND ATTENTIVE OF THE IMPORTANT
STUFF THAT IT’S NO WONDER WE CAN FEEL SO
CONFUSED AND OVERWHELMED.....

WE'RE INUNDATED BY ADVERTISING TELLING US THAT WE NEED EVERYTHING FROM CREDIT CARDS TO CRUISES JUST TO SURVIVE..... OUR WORLD HAS POWERFUL FORCES ALIVE AND AT WORK THAT PUSH AND PULL US AWAY FROM FAITHFULNESS AND TOWARD AN OBSESSION WITH THE SELF..... MARTIN LUTHER DEFINED SIN AS, "THE HEART ALL CURVED IN ON ITSELF." IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN WE MAY BE IN DANGER OF A WHOLE CULTURE OF INWARDLY CURVED HEARTS.

**SO HOW DO WE LEARN TO FOCUS ON THE
IMPORTANT STUFF, THE FAITHFUL STUFF, WHEN
WE'RE NOT ALWAYS SURE WHAT IS IMPORTANT
AND FAITHFUL?**

**FOLLOWING THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF
JESUS, OUR GOSPEL LESSON FROM LUKE
TAKES US WITH A COUPLE OF DISCIPLES
TRAVELING OUT OF JERUSALEM ON THE ROAD
TO EMMAUS..... NOW RIGHT AWAY THERE'S A
HINT ABOUT THE STATE OF MIND OF THESE
DISCIPLES AND WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE
COGNITIVELY AWARE OF THE WHAT'S
IMPORTANT.**

***THE HINT IS THAT WE'RE TOLD THEY WERE
HEADED OUT OF TOWN. THE QUESTION
BECOMES, ARE THEY GOING IN THE RIGHT
DIRECTION?***

***RIGHT DIRECTION? WRONG DIRECTION? WE
DON'T KNOW.***

**BUT THEN ALONG COMES A STRANGER WHO
JOINS THEM ON THEIR TREK OUT OF TOWN. BUT
IS IT A STRANGER?**

WE KNOW IT'S NOT, WE'RE ON THE INSIDE
TRACK AS READERS OF LUKE'S GOSPEL. WE
KNOW IT'S THE RISEN JESUS, BUT THESE
DISCIPLES DON'T RECOGNIZE HIM.....

WHY NOT? DID HE LOOK DIFFERENTLY? OR, IS
THERE SOMETHING ELSE GOING ON HERE?
WE'RE TOLD, "THEIR EYES WERE KEPT FROM
RECOGNIZING HIM" (24:16). WHAT DOES THAT
MEAN? DID GOD BLIND THEIR EYES? OR WERE
THEY JUST PLAIN DENSE? OR DULL? HOW
ABOUT OBTUSE OR THICK? (YOU GET THE
PICTURE)

PATIENTLY, JESUS WALKS WITH THEM AND ASKS ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE DISCUSSING. SHOCKED THAT THIS “STRANGER” IS UNAWARE OF THE EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS, THESE DISCIPLES BEGIN TO SHARE WITH THE STRANGER HOW JESUS, WHOM THEY HAD HOPED WOULD REDEEM ISRAEL, HAD BEEN CRUCIFIED, DEAD AND BURIED. BUT SOME WOMEN WERE NOW TELLING AN AMAZING STORY ABOUT NOT FINDING HIS BODY IN THE TOMB AND SEEING ANGELS WHO CLAIMED JESUS WAS ALIVE..... NOT SO PATIENTLY, JESUS SAYS TO THEM, “FOOLISH MEN, AND SLOW OF HEART TO BELIEVE IN ALL THAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN!

DIDN'T THE CHRIST HAVE TO SUFFER THESE THINGS AND TO ENTER INTO HIS GLORY?" (24:25-26). NEXT, JESUS GIVES THEM A RUN-THROUGH-SCRIPTURE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON. JESUS GOES ON TO INTERPRET THE SCRIPTURES FOR THEM AND SHOW HOW THE PROPHETS HAD FORETOLD ALL THAT HAD OCCURRED.

NOW, LET'S PAUSE HERE TO CLARIFY SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT. WHEN JESUS SCOLDS THESE DISCIPLES FOR BEING "SLOW OF HEART TO BELIEVE," WHAT HE'S REFERENCING IS NOT THE "HEART" AS WE THINK OF IT (SEAT OF EMOTION), BUT A HEBRAIC UNDERSTANDING OF "HEART" AS "MIND."

BUT HERE, AS THE RISEN JESUS WALKS WITH THESE DISCIPLES, THE IMPORTANT THING FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND IS WHY IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THESE THINGS TO HAVE HAPPENED TO THE MESSIAH----- TO UNDERSTAND THAT ALL OF SCRIPTURE AND THE PROPHETS WERE LEADING UP TO AND POINTING TO THE MESSIAH, THE CHRIST, JESUS OF NAZARETH.

UNFORTUNATELY, EVEN AFTER THIS LENGTHY TEACHING MOMENT, THESE DISCIPLES STILL DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.

HOW FRUSTRATED JESUS MUST HAVE BEEN AS HIS DISCIPLES NEVER SEEMED TO "GET IT!"

WHEN THEY FINALLY GET CLOSE TO EMMAUS,
THEIR DESTINATION, THESE TWO DISCIPLES
INVITE THE STRANGER TO COME AND EAT WITH
THEM.....

AND THEN, AND THERE, AT THE DINNER TABLE,
IT HAPPENS.

JESUS SITS DOWN, TAKES A LOAF OF BREAD,
BLESSES AND BREAKS IT AND GIVES IT TO
THEM, TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY..... SUDDENLY,
IN AN INSTANT, THESE DISCIPLES RECOGNIZE
JESUS, EVEN AS HE VANISHES FROM SIGHT.

**IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD THEY RECOGNIZE
JESUS..... SOMETIMES THE WAY TO
UNDERSTANDING OCCURS BEST THROUGH
ACTION.....**

**A GREAT EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE IS, “DO IT
AND THEN TALK ABOUT IT.” AND THAT’S
EXACTLY WHAT JESUS DOES HERE..... HE DOES
SOMETHING THAT IS UNIQUELY HIM. HE DOES
SOMETHING THAT CAUSES THOSE SYNAPSES TO
FINALLY START FIRING AND IN THE BLINK OF AN
EYE THEY GET IT..... IT ALL COMES TOGETHER.
THEY UNDERSTAND.....**

AND THEY SAY TO EACH OTHER, “WEREN’T OUR
HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US, WHILE HE SPOKE
TO US ALONG THE WAY, AND WHILE HE OPENED
THE SCRIPTURES TO US?” (24:32).

THIS MAKES MORE SENSE TO US WHEN, AGAIN,
WE REMEMBER THE HEBRAIC UNDERSTANDING
OF “HEART” AS “MIND.” THERE ARE EVEN SOME
OTHER RENDERINGS OF THIS PASSAGE THAT
READ, “WERE NOT OUR MINDS DULL AND DENSE
WHILE HE WAS TALKING TO US ON THE ROAD...”

ALL VERY INTERESTING, DON’T YOU THINK? BUT

WHAT DOES THIS STORY HAVE TO SAY TO US?

WHAT IS IT THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO

UNDERSTAND?

*I THINK, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, THE
STORY OF THE DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD TO
EMMAUS OFFERS US SOME GUIDANCE IN
STAYING FOCUSED ON THE IMPORTANT THINGS,*

TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY. JESUS' QUESTION TO
THE DISCIPLES IS AN APPROPRIATE ONE TO
HEAR JESUS ASK US EVERYDAY:

*“WHAT THINGS?” “WHAT THINGS ARE THE
IMPORTANT THINGS?”*

*TOO OFTEN WE JUST GO ABOUT OUR DAY
WITHOUT PRAYERFULLY, CRITICALLY
REFLECTING UPON WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT.*

DO I SPEND MY DAYS IN A QUEST FOR SELF-GRATIFICATION? AM I DOING THINGS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE? AM I FULFILLING GOD'S INTENTION FOR ME? AM I USING MY GIFTS TO THE FULLEST? AM I DOING THINGS JUST TO MEET SOMEONE ELSE'S EXPECTATIONS OR GAIN SOMEONE ELSE'S APPROVAL?-----AM I GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

NOW THAT LAST ONE (“AM I GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?”) IS AN INTERESTING ONE, BECAUSE THESE TWO DISCIPLES WERE HEADED OUT OF TOWN — LITERALLY AND METAPHORICALLY. THEY WERE GOING HOME, GIVING UP, THROWING THE TOWEL IN.

BUT JESUS DOESN'T SCOLD THEM, AT LEAST NOT AT FIRST, BUT HE WALKS WITH THEM. WHICH OUGHT TO TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE PATIENCE OF A GOD WHO WOULD BE WILLING TO WALK WITH FOOLISH HUMAN BEINGS LIKE YOU AND ME EVEN WHEN WE'RE HEADED IN THE WRONG DIRECTION..... OUR GOD DOES NOT ABANDON US EVEN WHEN WE'RE DETERMINED TO LEAVE JESUS BEHIND AND GET OUT OF TOWN..... JESUS STAYS WITH THEM ON THEIR WALK — IN THE WRONG DIRECTION — AND PRODS THEM TO REFLECT NOT ONLY CRITICALLY ON THE “THINGS” THAT HAVE HAPPENED, BUT REFLECT BIBLICALLY ON THOSE THINGS.

WHEN THESE TWO DISCIPLES EVENTUALLY GIVE JESUS A BLANK STARE, JESUS INTERPRETS THE SCRIPTURES FOR THEM, TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY, AND SHOWS THEM WHY IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THE CHRIST TO SUFFER, DIE, AND RISE

WHAT THIS SAYS TO US IS THAT WE CANNOT ALWAYS FIGURE IT OUT FOR OURSELVES.

ESPECIALLY WHEN WE'RE TRAVELING THE WRONG WAY — WE NEED HELP IN IDENTIFYING THE IMPORTANT THINGS. WE NEED TO BE TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY.

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT ENOUGH TO LEARN HOW TO BE PRAYERFULLY SELF-CRITICAL, *BUT TO LEARN HOW TO RECEIVE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM FROM OTHERS IS AN EVEN MORE RARE DISCIPLINE..... YET, IT IS A NECESSARY ONE AND A THOROUGHLY BIBLICAL ONE.*

WE NEVER KNOW WHEN WE'RE WALKING WITH JESUS. GOD CONTINUALLY WORKS THROUGH DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES, SPEAKING TO US IN WAYS THAT ARE MEANT TO HELP GET US BACK ON TRACK.

THE PROBLEM IS, WE DON'T OFTEN LIKE WHAT WE HEAR, ESPECIALLY IF IT'S COMING FROM A STRANGER, OR SOMEONE WE DON'T MUCH CARE FOR. SO WE DISREGARD WHATEVER COUNSEL THAT WE MAY RECEIVE OR RATIONALIZE IT AWAY BECAUSE WE ARE CERTAIN OF OUR OWN "RIGHTNESS." EVEN WHEN OUR CRITICS ARE OUR BEST FRIENDS IT'S OFTEN TOUGH TO GET AROUND OUR HUMAN PRIDE TO HEAR THE TRUTH WITHIN THE WORDS.

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THAT THE REAL REASON
WE DON'T READ THE BIBLE MORE IS NOT
BECAUSE WE'RE AFRAID WE WON'T
UNDERSTAND, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE
SECRETLY AFRAID WE WILL.

AND UNDERSTANDING CALLS FOR CHANGE, FOR
TRANSFORMATION, FOR GREATER
FAITHFULNESS. THE HARD TRUTH TO HEAR IS
THAT MANY OF US MAY OFTEN CHOOSE TO
REMAIN IGNORANT.

WE MAY CHOOSE TO TAKE A COGNITIVE
VACATION OUT OF TOWN SO WE WON'T BE
CALLED UPON TO PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER.
WE CHOOSE DENSENESS OVER DILIGENCE,
DULLNESS OVER DEPTH.

*FRIENDS, FAITH DOES INDEED SEEK
UNDERSTANDING, UNLESS WE GET IN THE WAY.
OUR FAITH SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND, TO MAKE
SENSE OF GOD'S ACTION IN JESUS CHRIST, AND
GOD'S ACTIVE PRESENCE IN OUR OWN LIVES.
UNDERSTANDING THIS IS AN IMPORTANT THING!*

THE CHALLENGE WE'RE LEFT WITH TODAY IS
ONE THAT CALLS US OUT OF OUR SELF-
IMPOSED DULLNESS, AND INTO AN INQUISITIVE
STATE OF BEING THAT NOT ONLY SEEKS
UNDERSTANDING BUT THAT WELCOMES
CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM SUCH AS, "YOU CAN
DO BETTER. WE CAN ALL DO BETTER."

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS WE
DESPERATELY NEED CHRIST'S PRESENCE, AND
THE PRESENCE OF ONE ANOTHER IN OUR LIVES.

DO WE UNDERSTAND THIS? IN UNAPOLOGETIC
CONTRAST TO WHAT OUR SOCIETY TELLS US
ABOUT BEING AN INDIVIDUAL, THE CHURCH
PROCLAIMS OUR DESPERATE NEED FOR JESUS
CHRIST AND FOR ONE ANOTHER.

ONE OF THE PRIMARY PURPOSES OF THE
CHURCH IS TO HELP PEOPLE IDENTIFY THE
IMPORTANT THINGS. WE ARE NOT HERE AS
INDIVIDUALS, BUT AS ONE BODY TO GROW IN
OUR UNDERSTANDING.

SO DO WE DARE GIVE IT TRY? DO WE DARE TO
LISTEN FOR WORDS OF TRUTH IN THE MOUTHS
OF OUR CRITICS? DO WE DARE BRING OUR
DULL, DENSE LIVES BEFORE GOD AND ONE
ANOTHER AND SAY, "I'M NOT SURE IF I'M ON THE
RIGHT ROAD. I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND. I
THINK I NEED SOME HELP."

THE CHALLENGE OF THE GOSPEL IS TO DARE TO
DO JUST THAT.

THE CALL OF THE CHURCH IS A CALL TO BE
VULNERABLE BEFORE GOD, SELF, AND OTHERS.

“FOR THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND TO YOUR
CHILDREN AND TO ALL THAT ARE FAR OFF,
EVERYONE TO WHOM THE LORD OUR GOD
CALLS TO HIM.” (ACTS 2:39) EVERYONE FOR
WHOM IMPORTANT THINGS MATTER.”

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN!