

Preaching.com



Road from Emmaus

Luke 23:36-49

By Maxie Dunnam

Luke 23:36-49

The theme of the weeks following Easter has been "The Road from Emmaus." I don't know how many of the sermons preached during this time have been on the theme, because I have not been here (except once). I've been "on the road" from Emmaus. I was here for the first worship. Lawson Stone preached and the Gospel lesson of the Emmaus story was read. But Lawson is an Old Testament man. He couldn't stay with the New Testament. He did a powerful exposition of [Psalm 84](#).

But he began with Emmaus and made the challenging point that the Christian faith is not about arriving somewhere; it's not about destinations but journeying. When a truth like that is sounded, it evokes a "yeah." It seems too obvious.

I.

Even so, in most of our considerations of the Scriptural account of the Emmaus story, we read from [verse 13 to verse 35](#) — and we usually stop there. You noted that I picked up with [verse 36](#) because here is, as Paul Harvey would say, "the rest of the story" — and the rest of the story adds tremendous meaning. So, I want to talk to you not about the walk to Emmaus but the walk from Emmaus.

Did you hear the story of that important business executive who boarded the New-Orleans-to-Washington train? He was a heavy sleeper and he needed to be awakened in order to get off the train in Atlanta about five o'clock in the morning. He had a very important business engagement there so he found a porter and told him, "I want you to awaken me in order that I might get off the train at five o'clock in the morning. Now I'm a heavy sleeper," he said. "It doesn't matter how much I fret and fuss and fume or what I do to you — I have to get off the train in Atlanta. If you have to remove me bodily," he said, "you get me off that train in Atlanta."

Well, the next morning he awakened about nine o'clock, having slept all night and having missed Atlanta, found that he was speeding toward Washington. He located the porter and really poured it on with all sorts of abusive language, almost attacking the poor guy bodily. After he left, someone said to the porter, "How could you stand there and take that kind of talk from that man?" The porter said, rather bewildered, "That ain't nothin'! You should've heard that guy I put off in Atlanta!"

Many of us not only fail to get off at the right station, we miss the train — and too many of us, I'm afraid, miss the train of the total gospel message — that's the reason we have to read the rest of the story — and we have to think about the walk from Emmaus.

Get the setting in mind now. After recognizing Jesus, when he broke bread with them down in Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion returned at once to Jerusalem. They hurried to the room where the eleven and those with them had assembled. They discovered that those assembled there were saying to each other, "It's true — the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." So these two could verify the fact. They told what had happened to them on the way — and how they recognized Jesus when He broke the bread. That's where we pick up the story.

While they were talking about this, Jesus Himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking that they saw a ghost.

Isn't that just like us? Here they were talking about the risen Christ — assuring each other that it had indeed happened — Jesus was no longer dead but alive. But now Jesus appears to them as they've

gathered there — and they couldn't believe it. They were frightened — and they thought it was a ghost. How many times does Jesus come to us and we don't recognize Him?

Did you recognize Him last week when your spouse made a fumbling attempt to apologize and ask forgiveness, but you were still fuming and nursing your self-pity? . . .

. . . that friend who stayed up with you until two o'clock in the morning as you poured out your pain and hopelessness because your battle with pornography is still raging — or maybe it was another addition — or your sexual brokenness. . .

. . . did you see Jesus in that worker in the nursing home — the one who changed the diaper of your now-helpless parent?

. . . did you recognize Jesus in that nagging tightening in your stomach in chapel last week when you were convicted of sin and the need for repentance — or when the vision of Kingdom ministry was laid out and you knew you were called to make some response?

. . . have you been recognizing Jesus in the faces of the Iraqi children who are the innocent victims in that hopeless land?

How many times does Jesus come to us and we don't recognize him?

Jesus did with this small group gathered there in that upper room what he had done with Cleopas and his companion on the road — he illuminated Scripture. Remember — on that walk to Emmaus, He talked to them about how the prophets had spoken and how they had revealed that Christ would have to suffer before he entered His glory.

Now in this upper room — the same scenario repeats itself. Listen to verses 45 and 46: "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.'" We don't like it, and most of us disregard it, but here is the central message of Christianity — the Cross. Jesus revealed it on the walk to Emmaus and the walk from Emmaus. At the center of the Christian faith is the cross of Jesus Christ.

II.

Nail it down: the walk from Emmaus involves the cross. Nothing, absolutely nothing, reveals the heart of God, as does the cross.

I shared in a wedding recently back in Memphis — Ashley Bourland's. Ashley was a flower girl in our daughter Kim's wedding years ago. We have shared with the family during her growing up years as she has become an ardent Christian. Her parents Don and Paula are among our dearest friends. They gave us a beautiful wrought iron cross — about 24 inches high with a 12-inch cross-beam. At the center of the cross is a medallion on which is written these words: "When Jesus was on the cross, we were on His mind."

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer?" Jesus asked Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus. And now, in the room back in Jerusalem, he reminded them, "It is written that the Messiah is to suffer."

This is our salvation — we claim it and we celebrate it. But I have a challenging word: if at Emmaus we have claimed and affirmed our salvation through the cross, then our walk from Emmaus involves our taking up the cross. Let me say that again. The walk from Emmaus involves our taking up the cross. Paul knew this. He was a man of one passion — to know Christ. And he knew that knowing Christ involved the cross for himself. Do you remember that radical expression of the deep, deep passion of his life — Philippians 3:10: "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death." This was such a radical part of Paul's life that he never ceased talking about it. He wrote to the Colossians, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church." It's a strange and somewhat confusing word. Some may charge Paul with thinking that somehow Christ's suffering was insufficient for human sin, and that he had to do something about that. That's not the issue at all.

There is nothing deficient in Christ's self-offering as a reconciling act — nothing at all. What Paul is expressing is what he sought to live out as the deepest desire of his life — to join in the fellowship of Christ's suffering. He was calling for the pattern of Christ's own saving work to be incorporated in the

life of every Christian — that we would reproduce that kind of passion, that willingness to suffer, to give ourselves in a cross-style of life.

Frances de Sales, one of the saints with whom I've kept company through the years, has a memorable passage about our relationship to the cross. Listen to him:

Kiss frequently the crosses which the Lord sends you . . . without regarding of what sort they may be . . .

Now listen to this:

The merit of crosses does not consist of their weight, but in the manner in which they are borne. (A Year With The Saints, p. 115)

Does that sound like a strange notion? "Kiss frequently the crosses which the Lord sends you." If we can get beyond the strangeness of the image — we will discover the truth that we are to welcome the suffering that comes into our lives as an invitation to love and trust God more. And to make our suffering an extension of the suffering of Christ.

What cross in your life do you need to kiss? I know some of them because you have asked me to pray for you:

- the cross you bear for a child caught in the chains of a destructive addiction
- disabled parents for whom you are having to care
- an unsatisfying job that is apparently the only means of survival for your family while you are here at seminary
- being a single parent because an irresponsible, uncaring spouse left you to go his selfish way
- the call to serve the poor
- a life of chastity as a single person

What cross in your life do you need to kiss?

The big question is: are we willing to give ourselves for the sake of others and for the world? As the bread and wine of holy communion is the body of Christ broken for us and His blood poured out on our behalf — so Christ would want us to be the bread broken for the sake of the world and the blood poured out for the salvation of others.

That can't happen, my friends, without a willingness to suffer on the part of Christians.

Some of you have heard me tell stories of Christians that we have come to know in Eastern Europe — who were a part of the Soviet Union — who remained faithful and played such a powerful role in keeping the Christian witness alive in that godless, oppressive, communist regime. Some of those folks are in Czechoslovakia and I've had a great time sharing fellowship with them. One of the persons in Czechoslovakia that I've wanted to meet — but never had the opportunity — is Vaclav Maly. He was the Catholic priest who in 1981 was defrocked for preaching the gospel and dispatched by the communists to clean the toilets in the subway system of Prague.

On Christmas Eve, in 1989, when the crowds began to move out into the streets, when it looked like, finally, the communist power structure was going to be overturned, the crowd started chanting, "Maly! Maly!" Maly was doing the job he had been condemned to — cleaning the toilets. So, up out of the subway Vaclav Maly, the defrocked priest, came. He led the crowd down to the main square of Old Prague. The New York Times told the story. Eight hundred thousand people gathered around while Maly administered the service and offered forgiveness to all the communists. All they had to do was come forward and repent — and they did it, by the hundreds!

You may remember the story. The next morning, the tanks were gone. They called it the "velvet revolution" — not a single drop of blood was shed. And Maly was the hero of that "velvet revolution." The power of the cross — in one person's life.

His life reflected at least an echo of St. Paul. "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death."

Let me put it this way: we must walk from Emmaus bearing a cross. And, my friends, if you're not bearing a cross — if you're not willing to suffer — if you don't have a passion to share in the suffering of Christ for the sake of the world, you need to revisit what Emmaus is all about.

III.

Then there is this truth in the story of the walk from Emmaus. It's there in verse 47 of our text: "And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

John's gospel tells this story in a slightly different way. The frightened disciples of Jesus gathered in fear behind bolted doors. Jesus has been crucified and they are afraid that the vengeful enemies of Jesus will seek them out.

Jesus came to those men who had locked themselves inside that room. The Scripture says he came and "stood in their midst."

When Jesus showed them the nail prints in His hands and the wounds in His side. Scripture says, "They were glad." Why were they glad? They knew now that this was not just another Jesus who had come. These scars were the marks that proved that the crucified Jesus had risen and was alive among them.

After showing them His nail-scarred hands, He said, "Peace be with you." And then He commissioned them: "As the Father has sent Me, so send I you."

What is going on here? Can you believe it? These men are cowards. They're frightened out of their wits — they are helpless. Yet it is to this rag-tag group that Jesus says, "As the Father has sent Me, so send I you." He commissions them to the same ministry that He has been performing with them through the past three years — healing the sick, forgiving sins, giving hope, reconciling people, calling people to new life. He is calling these weak, frightened, bewildered, helpless disciples to be about the mighty work of the Kingdom. How could it be? Well, it can't be — it can't be unless something else happens. So, the Scripture says, Jesus breathed on them. That's what it says. "He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

"As God had breathed His life into the first man, and he became a living soul, so now His Son, Jesus, shares the intimacy of His own life with His disciples that they might become a new community."

Now remember, this is prior to Pentecost. These disciples were given a foretaste of the Holy Spirit Who would come and remain in them permanently after Jesus returned to the Father.

You remember how He sought to prepare them for His death. He told them that He was going back to the Father, and what did He promise He would do when He went to the Father? He said He would send the Holy Spirit. And what would the Holy Spirit do? He would give us power — "for you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you."

In Luke's account — after Emmaus — Jesus says, "I am going to send you what my Father promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (vs. 49).

That's our problem — isn't it? We have not been "clothed with power from on high." We disregard this most spectacular promise of power through the Holy Spirit and try to go it alone. We trust Jesus with some things some of the time, when we need to trust Him with all things all the time.

We need the presence of the Holy Spirit creating the kind of fellowship where "one loving heart sets another on fire." The presence of the Holy Spirit, which gives the congregation the boldness to attempt the impossible for the sake of the Kingdom.

Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you made a sacrifice for the sake of Christ? When was the last time you took upon yourself a cross of love — a burden you couldn't bear in your own power, the burden of another:

- a parent, a brother or sister, still lost in sin
- a friend struggling with such low self-esteem that he hangs on to you and drains you of emotional energy
- a spouse who is resistant to your vocation
- a child who is in the far country

- a lifelong friend who has turned her back on you because you have chosen the road less traveled

Are you willing to take up a cause that is so heavy —

- the cause of loving and serving the poor
- the cause of racial reconciliation
- the cause of world peace
- the cause of saving our culture from rampant pornography
- the cause of world mission to an unsaved people group
- the cause of authentic/passionate evangelism to secular people . . .

. . . a cause so heavy that only the power of the Holy Spirit will keep your knees from buckling as you stumble along under that cross of love and sacrifice.

The walk from Emmaus calls us to take up our cross — to kiss the crosses in our lives — but also — hallelujah! — to stay in the city until we are clothed with power from on high.

I remember the World Methodist Conference that met in Rio de Janeiro in 1994. Rio de Janeiro is a study in contrasts. In one direction from my hotel, I could look and see the spectacular beaches that stretch from Ipanema to Copacabana. I love the beach — the beauty of it — the waves crashing on the rocks. Along the beach the sidewalks were tiled with mosaics and crowded with beautiful people. Trendy as well as tacky hotels lined one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. But when you look in another direction, you see the largest favela in Brazil — a shantytown or slum. Some estimate that as many as 250,000 people are crowded into the tiny concrete block huts stacked upon one another on the mountainside like a beehive. In fact, "beehive" is the literal translation of the word favela.

In the middle of that favela, the Methodists of Brazil have established an amazing ministry called "The Hope Factory." What imagination, commitment, and passion for the poor!

High above all of that, dominating the entire landscape of that beautiful city, is the magnificent statue of Christ the Redeemer. You've seen a picture of that statue if you've seen a picture of Rio de Janeiro. It dominates everything — the Christ standing there on top of Corcovado. Jesus faces the ocean — and that means that His back is toward the favela. While at the conference, I heard this story. On a particularly difficult day, a worker in "The Hope Factory" said that she looked up, saw the back of the statue, and felt that Christ had turned his back on the people of the favela. It was a dark moment — a dismal moment that began to breed hopelessness in her heart. Then one of the people reminded her, "He has not turned His back on us; He's leading us out."

We began by saying that the Christian faith is not a destination — not an arrival at some point — but a journeying. It's a walk from Emmaus. And again remember — that walk calls us to take up our cross — to kiss the crosses in our lives — but also to stay in the city until we're clothed with power from on high — knowing that the Christ never turns His back on us — but leads us on — on to life and to sharing life with others.

Maxie D. Dunnam is President of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY. He is a Senior Consulting Editor of Preaching.