



Sermon, April 30, 2017

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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

## **Raising Jesus, Raising Us**

Faith Lutheran and Junction City United Methodist Church Joint  
Service

### **Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV)**

**13** Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, **14** and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, **16** but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. **17** And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" **19** He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. **22** Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, **23** and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." **25** Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! **26** Was it not necessary that the Messiah[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. **28** As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. **29** But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. **30** When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. **32** They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" **33** That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. **34** They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

### **Scripture: Romans 6:1-14**

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

## Raising Jesus, Raising Us

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

### **Near-Death Experiences**

**Movie:** *Resurrection* (starred Ellen Burstyn, Sam Shepard), came out in 1982, and told the story of a woman who died in a car accident, but came back from death in what is called a "Near-Death Experience." The story was fictional, the phenomenon of Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) is more extensive than many people realize. There are several websites devoted to collecting the stories of people who have been clinically dead, but for reasons unknown return to life. There is widespread fascination with those experiences: "What can you tell us about what lies beyond death?"

Some people feel a mission to tell people about the love they experienced, or to try and make the world a better place. Can you think of titles of books? Or perhaps you know someone who has had such an experience?

All of these can be described as *Messages from Beyond*. How does one live here in this world when one has experienced a taste of the world to come? What new perspective might we have concerning life here, and our personal struggles, the political and economic systems of the world, the values, ethics and morality of our society? How might we live differently?

### **Jesus on the Road to Emmaus: An after-death appearance.**

The story of the encounter between the risen Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is powerful because it speaks to our human desire to know what lies beyond death. Luke tells us that in his conversation with

the two disciples on the road, he taught them about the scriptures, what they said about his death, etc.

All Christian preaching concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is from a post-death experience. The entire New Testament is written from this post-Death/resurrection point of view. In order to understand it, we need to enter into the story and be changed by the story itself. We need to be like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and encounter the One who has been to the Other Side, and has returned to lead us in the way of life beyond death.

In order to comprehend the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, we have to enter into the experience of Jesus' death. This is what Jesus means when he teaches these things about dying to a life that is bound up in the ways of death:

- "Pick up your cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23)
- "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (or save it)." (Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24)

Paul himself understands that the new life that Jesus Christ offers is essentially a change from an old way of being to a new way of being: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). The Christian faith, and its walk of life is really incomprehensible from a Pre-Resurrection perspective. In order to understand it, you have to enter into it. You have to enter into Jesus' death, which is what baptism symbolizes. But how do we experience resurrection?

As one example, I'd like to share a little story about myself from about 40 years ago.

I was raised in the church. We started attending Whitney UMC in Boise when I was about 2 years old, and we went every Sunday we could. I

took church seriously, and listened closely to what the minister said every Sunday, read my children's Bible and looked at all the pictures, went to Sunday School faithfully for years and was a regular in the youth group. All 8 boys did this and my two parents set the example. So, I took this following Jesus stuff seriously.

Along about the time I started High School, I started to rebel and chafe against some of my parents' restrictions, with particularly pronounced conflicts with my mom. One result of this conflict was that I started getting involved in drugs at school.

By the end of my Sophomore year, 1972, I reached a crossroads in my life. I had registered for a Senior High Camp at Sawtooth. I made a bargain with God before heading up that dusty road that year: either God did something tremendous at that camp, or I was going to get heavier into drugs. That's just the kind of challenge God enjoys.

One night as the 12 youth and 3 adults at that camp sat around in a circle in the lodge talking about deep stuff, I suddenly sensed this voice speaking to me. It was saying, "Who do you think you're fooling, Craig Strobel?" I "heard" it several times. It was a voice so loving and so truthful that it cut clean through all the crap I was throwing up in my life, and speared my heart. I knew it could only be Jesus. Tears were streaming down my face and a friend helped me pray to Jesus for forgiveness and to turn my life over to him. I remember being flooded with such an overwhelming flood of joy that I was leaping over tall sagebrush bushes in a single bound, as if I were Superman.

I've tried to understand what happened that summer, and how it changed the course of my life. I think Paul's comments in this morning's reading from Romans best explains it: the same Power that raised Jesus from the dead touched my dead-end life and raised it into a new Easter beginning. I was limping along acting religious by doing all the churchy religious things - going to church, Sunday School, youth group, youth rallies - but the power of religion was escaping me. What needed to happen is that I needed to die to a whole way of life and thinking about myself that was a clear path to death. This is what Paul means when he says, "Do you not

know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

And notice that phrase Paul uses, the passive construction of the verb: “Christ was raised.” Jesus didn’t raise himself. God raised him.

Resurrection is something that *God does in us*. There are some things in life, particularly in the spiritual life, that are beyond us. We can attend all the church services possible, serve at all the breakfasts or soup kitchens in town, read and memorize the whole Bible – whatever – but we can still have a hollow shell for a faith. John Wesley called it “having the form of religion without the power.” There is something that God needs to do in us to transform us, to make that difference in our lives, which moves us from a cold dark tomb into a bright Hallelujah-Easter-morning new life. This is the movement of a Greater Power called Grace.

That greater Power raised Jesus from the dead, and can do the same thing for us. Paul says it this way: “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

That is what new life is all about. We don’t have to wait until we die to experience the power of the resurrection. The resurrection is all about the power of transformation, of the difference God can make in our lives.

So, this is what I want you to take home with you today: It doesn’t matter what is going on in your life. It doesn’t matter what corner you’ve backed yourself into. It doesn’t matter how bleak things look right now. There is no tomb too deep, no maze too twisted, no life too far gone that God can’t transform it. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God can raise you into new life. God can make a difference.

*Prayer*