

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Encountering the Life-Changing Jesus

Hearts Set on Fire by a Risen Jesus!

(Luke 24:13-35)

Study #6

Introduction: No need for a reception-time nap...

As you may have heard by now, our leader of youth ministries over the past four years, Landry Saathoff, is getting married on May 28th to the lovely Caitlin Pringle.

There will be rehearsals, a ceremony, and a reception, just as there are for lots of couples.

I am not a prophet, but I predict that near the end of the reception, many of the people present will be tired. Even the family - big fans of the wedding and the party, will start to fade.

But - and again, I'm no prophet - my bet is that Landry Saathoff and the by-then Caitlin Saathoff will not be tired.

It's a funny thing, but newly married couples almost never yawn through the reception. They invariably look and are thoroughly refreshed.

In the weeks leading up to the wedding, the couple had been way busier than anybody else. They were busy throughout the whole day of the wedding. But even as leave the reception, they don't look at all tired.

If I'm accurate in my prognostication, Landry's and Caitlin's energy will be consistent with what I've seen at weddings over the years.

It's weird.

Despite an over-full schedule leading up to a wedding and an activity level that is tailor-made to ensure exhaustion, brides and grooms are rarely out of gas on that day.

I have never had to wake up a bride or a groom to tell them it's time to walk down the aisle, head over to the reception, or leave for the honeymoon.

There is a dynamic at work within the heart of a man and woman on the day of their wedding that trumps what would be understandable exhaustion.

They are energized with the passion of hearts on fire.

Of course, literal fire doesn't just happen. Fire ignites with the right combination of heat, fuel, and oxygen.

And the hearts of a bride and groom are ignited at the junction of love for each other, a launch into a bright, unknown future, and the defining moment of a wedding.

Two thousand years ago, when brokenness was joined to both faith and sight, a very contagious fire ignited in the hearts of some of Jesus' earliest disciples.

They discovered that their Savior was alive, and a flame ignited in their souls. Today, they invite us to join them in the fire. Now, to review.

Backtracking -

- Friday afternoon: Jesus died and was buried (Luke 23:44-53)

Jesus was nailed to a cross on a Friday morning. He hung there until the middle of the afternoon.

Around 3:00pm, a spear pierced His side. The rush of blood and water from the wound confirmed that He was dead.

A disciple of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, stepped forward to handle Jesus' burial arrangements. Up until this moment Joseph had been a "secret" disciple for fear of the Jews. (See John 20)

Here, though, he steps out from the shadows to request Jesus' body from the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who said, "Yes." Joseph laid the body in his own tomb, which was a cave hewn out of the rock.¹

- Sunday morning: The scene at the tomb (Luke 23:54--24:12)

A small group of faithful women from Galilee who had been following Jesus watched to see where He was buried so that they could go back there after the Sabbath to embalm Jesus' body.

By Jewish law, the work of embalming could not take place on a Sabbath², so it had to be put off until the first day of the week, Sunday.

There would have been great sorrow among all of Jesus' followers. These women would have grieved the loss of Jesus, their Friend and Lord.

On Friday evening, they were inconsolable. Saturday would have been interminable.

The only thing keeping the women going was this one final thing they were going to do for Jesus. They will go to the tomb first thing Sunday morning and they will anoint His dead body.

The anointing will put a period to the story of Jesus. And they will discover that the death of Jesus was followed, not by a period, but by a comma.

Having spent a good bit of time last weekend seeing what happened on that first Easter Sunday morning, I'm going to only hit the highlights today, which will catapult us into the first Easter Sunday afternoon.

According to Luke's account, it was just before daybreak, when the women arrived at the tomb, motivated by love, not by faith.³

While at the Tomb... (Luke 24:1-12)

News that Proves (Luke 24:1-8)

They had brought spices for the work in front of them and were shocked to find the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.

Jesus' body was gone. They were flabbergasted.

You can probably recall times when you've been flabbergasted by something. Maybe it was after a win or a loss by your team, an election result, or a doctor's report.

Something happened and it was so unexpected that you didn't know what to do next. You just stood there, processing, mouth open.

Well, mid-gawk, things got very interesting for the women on that morning at the tomb.

Two angels showed up,⁴ and all of a sudden, the tomb got crowded. (An alarming situation!) We're not surprised when we read that the women were terrified.

They didn't speak to the angels, but the angels did speak to them.

¹ Joseph was a member of the Jewish Supreme Court (the Sanhedrin) that had convicted Jesus of blasphemy and which led to Him being taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who condemned Him to be crucified.

² Even more so when the Sabbath was also the Day of Passover, as it was that year.

³ In Jewish usage, the term "*three days and three nights*" "that referred to any part of three successive 24-hour periods. Seventy-two hours are not required between Jesus' death and resurrection to fulfill the prophecy.

⁴ Matthew tells us only of one, but don't let that concern you. Matthew didn't say it was only one. He just mentioned one.

Roughly paraphrased, they ask, *“What in the world are you doing in a tomb looking for The Living One? Sure, ladies, Jesus WAS dead, but He sure isn’t dead now! He told you that He was going to rise again.”*

Then, the women remembered. Lights went on in their minds and fireworks exploded in their hearts. They realized, *“We could have slept in!”*

They could have saved themselves a long walk to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning if only they had remembered.

But their forgetfulness brought them the honor of being the first to *hear* the news of the resurrection AND the honor of getting to *announce* the resurrection first to others.

They ran back into the city with hearts on fire.

“Too Good to Be True” News! (Luke 24:9-11)

Breathless, they reported what had just happened at the tomb *“to the eleven and to all the rest.”*⁵

Which means that now, just like that, there are over a dozen believers! Only, not so fast.

[11] But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe⁶ them.⁷

The apostles thought the women were spreading fake news - and we get that. We hear things we don’t believe pretty regularly, often because they are unbelievable.

But Luke makes it clear that the women’s report was believable. The men simply would not believe their report.

⁵ We know the apostles (minus Judas Iscariot) were there. Then, there would have been Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and no doubt others, too.

⁶ The Greek word describing their unbelief is *“apisteuo”* - same word used as in 24:11 when the apostles *“would not believe”* the women’s report from the tomb.

⁷ These men were not on the brink of belief, needing only an excuse to launch into a proclamation of resurrection. They were utterly skeptical. Clearly irrefutable evidence was needed to convince them.

What is prompting their unbelief was not that the report was unbelievable. It was the mechanism of self-protection.

You can almost hear their thoughts: *“I may get burned once, but not twice. I put my trust in Jesus once - I’m not going to do it again.”*

Self-protection can kick in for any of us after a failure of most any kind, from business to romance. Self-protection walls us off from the risk of getting hurt...and from the possibility of joy and hope.

We continue with the story, though, and read these words: ***“But Peter...”*** I love that.

News That Changes Lives! (24:12)

Simon Peter heard the women’s report, cast aside his self-protection, and opened himself up to hope. Luke writes, ***[12] But Peter got up and ran to the tomb...***

He didn’t walk by faith. Peter ran by faith to the tomb.

And when he arrived at the tomb, he stooped down, looked in, and saw a scene that amazed him.

Peter took in the scene, took a short leap of faith, and jumped to a resurrection conclusion.

Luke tells us that ***“he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.”*** Peter went back believing that Jesus was alive.

He will soon see much more evidence, but what has happened had him convinced. Peter...

- didn’t see a heavenly vision.
- didn’t see an angel.
- didn’t see Jesus.

But aided by the fuel of Jesus’ promises, the heat of the women’s testimony, and the oxygen of the cold, empty tomb - Peter believed, heart on fire.

Today, we all you and I stand in Peter's shoes.

- If we were in Jerusalem right now, we would see an empty tomb. (The body of Jesus has never surfaced.)
- We can hear the two-thousand-year-old testimony of the women as we read our Bibles.
- We can also read Jesus' promise that He would rise from the dead.

And, like Peter, we can marvel at what has happened.

And, if today, for the very first time, any of us believe in a crucified and resurrected Jesus, He will give us eternal life and will make us a daughter or a son of God. Slate wiped clean. Fresh start. New beginning. Flaming heart.

Now, what we have just seen is a great scene. And it's also a pretty well-known scene.

But our main focus today is going to be on another, somewhat less familiar, scene. It is a part of the Easter story that only Luke records. I think it's a timely one.

Luke continues the story of what happened on that first post-resurrection Sunday. And he brings us from the story of Jesus' most famous disciple - Peter - into the story of two not very famous disciples.

Hearts Are Sad. EN ROUTE TO Emmaus (Luke 24:13-27)

Two Disciples Take a Hike (vv. 13-14)

[13] And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem.

There is a lot about this episode we don't know.

We know the name of one of these guys, but nothing else about him, as he's not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. We don't even know the name of his friend.

We know that they had left Jerusalem at some point on Sunday, but we don't know exactly when.

We also don't know why they were walking to Emmaus or the location of Emmaus. Yes, we know it was seven miles outside of Jerusalem, but we don't know in which direction.⁸

When we catch up to them, ***[14] And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place.***

By "***these things***" Luke is referring to Jesus' last days, His trials, His crucifixion, His burial. These two men would have been still reeling from the horrors of Friday's crucifixion.

As they walked and talked, they were joined by Someone.

The Two Are Joined by a Third (vv. 15-24)

The incognito Jesus (vv. 15-17a)

[15] While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. [16] But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.⁹

WE know (because Luke tells us) that this Other was Jesus.

But Cleopas and his friend didn't know. By some means, He was veiled to them. They saw Him only as a stranger on the road coming out of Jerusalem.

Walking faster than they were, He had caught up with them and began walking with them. The Stranger spoke.

[17a] And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?"

⁸ The name means "warm springs" and could have been one of several places. There is some evidence (a good guess?) that Emmaus was about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Lydda, near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

⁹ We don't know exactly why they didn't recognize Him. Maybe they didn't recognize Him because He didn't want them to recognize Him.

That's funny. This is Jesus, *incognito*, asking His disciples to explain to Him what they had been talking about, when what they had been talking about was Him.

The two describe recent events (vv. 17b-24)

Sad and surprised (vv. 17b-18)

[17b]...And they stood still, looking sad. [18] One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?"

Jesus, playing the part of the Stranger, played along, *"What things are you talking about?"*

So, Jesus' two disciples proceeded to give their report about Jesus to Jesus.

Synopsis (vv. 19-21)

[19]... "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, [20] and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. [21] But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened."

Notice a couple of things from this joint response of the two to Jesus' question.

They referred to Jesus as a prophet. They weren't being disrespectful. It's an honorable thing to be called a prophet.

But they didn't call Him *"Messiah."* They didn't believe He was the Messiah, not anymore. Not since what happened on Friday.

Then, you caught, ***"We were hoping."***, right? Past tense. *"We're not hoping anymore."* Hope died on Friday.

But they do admit to being puzzled about something.

Confusion (vv. 22-24)

[Luke 24:22] "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, [23] and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also 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 exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see."

"So, you see, Stranger, we're just not sure what to make of it all."

At this, the Stranger spoke. Cleopas and his friend still didn't know Who was walking and talking with them. And His first words don't quite pass the *"How to win friends and influence people"* test!

Opening the Scriptures - and Finding Jesus! (vv. 25-27)

[25] And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" [27] Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

How long does it take you to walk seven miles? Walking at a good clip - three miles per hour - it might take you a couple of hours. Maybe a bit more.

If you're low on energy - like Cleopas and his friend were - it can take a good bit longer.

So, let's assume that Jesus has well over two hours to explain what we today call "The Old Testament" to these two disciples.

Wouldn't you have loved to have been there?

- Jesus would have included the scene in the Garden of Eden where God promised a coming redeemer after Adam and Eve fell into sin.
- He would have told about the *almost* sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's son, which preceded the *actual* sacrifice of God's Son.

- He would have explained the sacrificial system which foreshadowed the Messiah's sacrificial death.

Luke tells us that Jesus spoke from ALL the prophets.

So, is it too much to think that Jesus found references to Himself in Isaiah AND Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi!?¹⁰

Jesus talked and talked and talked about the Messiah while they walked and walked.

I'm betting that by the time they arrived at Emmaus, Cleopas and his friend were putting two and two together, and were seeing how the life of Jesus fit everything that was foretold about the Messiah.

Maybe they were getting less confused. Maybe they were beginning to wonder if they had allowed hope to die prematurely...

Well, all good things must end, and the three have now reached Emmaus. The seven-mile-journey is over.

Hearts Are Opened, IN Emmaus (vv. 28-32)

One Journey Ends... (vv. 28-29)

[28] And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther.

[29] But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them.

The three men sat down to eat late in the afternoon when Cleopas and his friend had an "eye-opening moment."

...And Another Journey Begins (vv. 30-31)

¹⁰ Surely, He would have spoken from the great prophecy of Isaiah 53, where Isaiah describes the sacrifice and victory of the Servant of the Lord.

[30] When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them.

And when He did that, we can almost picture them looking back and forth at each other, then at Jesus, then at each other.

"Hey, wait a minute. That sure looked familiar. Cleopas, do you remember back in Galilee when Jesus fed the 5,000? He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it out the same way. Hey, Stranger, you remind me of Someone..." - and like that, Jesus was gone. He vanished.¹¹

Hearts Fan into Flame (v. 32)

[32] They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

And with that, they arose - *Meal eaten? Uneaten? Who cares? Jesus is alive!* - and returned to Jerusalem, covering those seven miles like it was a competitive 12K!

When they got back, they burst into the room where they found the rest of the disciples, with a breathless report.

Hearts Are on Fire, POST-Emmaus! (vv. 33-35)

[34]... "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." [35] They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

Now, keep in mind that by this time it is late in the evening.

These two began the day defeated and sad. But they have now added seven miles to the seven they had walked earlier over the same rough, rugged uphill and downhill - and they are completely energized! What happened?

¹¹ ***[31] Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.***

What happened to them is the same sort of thing that happened to the women in the morning, that happened to Peter a bit later, and that happens to brides and grooms on the day of their wedding.

Tiredness was overcome by events. Excitement consumed exhaustion.

The hearts of these two disciples were set on fire by the heat of the women's early morning report, and the oxygen of Jesus' words, and the spark of hope ignited at the breaking of the bread.

Jesus was alive - and that changed everything.

Conclusion:

That phrase - *"that changes everything"* - has undoubtedly been overused. But there are moments in life that DO change everything. Lots of us have had them. These days can be delightful or devastating.

For instance, I was then, and I am still delighted that Kathy said *"I do"* over forty years ago. Her presence in my life has changed everything, and I am so very grateful. And the births of our three children were all wonderful *"that changed everything"* events.

I look back on days when I have met certain people as the days that began a rich new chapter in my life, changing everything.

And, of course, there have also been dark *"that changes everything"* days, too.

Many times, a friend's medical diagnosis has shattered the illusion of control and broken my heart. Tragedies on the world stage have often changed everything for the scarier.

Sometimes, when something BIG has happened, I've even had the thought, *"Well, THAT changes everything."*

"That changes everything" can be applied to the advent of cell phones, stock market crashes, an election, the outbreak of war, or the

outbreak of a virus, the marriage of Landry to Caitlin - that sort of thing.

So, to drive home the idea of the resurrection of Jesus being a *"that changes everything"* event for all of us for all time, here's a thought experiment...

Imagine that you are at war in a foreign land, fighting for your country and you've been captured by the enemy.

You don't know what is in store for you, but you know it won't be good.

You understand that you may be imprisoned for a long time, that you may suffer greatly, that you might not ever be released to return to your wife and family, and that you might be killed.

Now, imagine that an angel appeared to you in your captivity.

This angel gave you a promise from God that He would be with you throughout your long captivity, and that you would not die in that place, that you would suffer no permanent injuries, and that, in time, your captors would release you and you would be reunited with your wife and family and friends.

How would the knowledge that all would be well at the end impact your stay in prison? How would it impact your ability to bear up? Wouldn't it change everything?

When it comes to *"that changes everything"* moments and events, the greatest of them all - for the world and for you and for me - was Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

That Christ was raised from the dead, doesn't mean that God will protect you from all harm and loss. It means that the One who defeated death and sin will be with you in every loss.

That Christ is alive doesn't mean that life will be a bed of roses. It means that all will end unbelievably well.

After Jesus' death and burial, fear and despair gripped the heart of every one of Jesus' followers.

Then, fear and despair fled in the face of the empty tomb. With the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost, they went on to lead lives of courage and grace.

That - leading a life of courage and grace - is your birthright as a daughter or a son of God through faith in Jesus.

Jesus is alive. Anything is possible. Share the Good News. Serve. Pray. Give. Love.

He is risen! He is risen, indeed!!