

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus' Hard Path That Leads to Gospel For Us

EASTER SUNDAY!

Hearts on Fire!

(Luke 24)

Study #5

Introduction: Unexpected energy...

Through the years, I've thoroughly enjoyed officiating at a good many weddings. After all these weddings, I've noticed a pattern.

The consistent pattern is that at every wedding there is energy buzzing about in the main actors (bride; groom) - and that is amazing.

It's amazing because if there are any two people who could more reasonably be exhausted, spent, out of gas - it is the happy couple on the day of their wedding.

With all of the planning, preparation, details, lists, invitations, set-up, and parties in the weeks leading up to a wedding, it would seem inevitable that the bride and groom would be exhausted. In fact, the marriage racket is a system tailor-made to ensure exhaustion.

But, regardless of the activity level leading up to the wedding, not once have I ever had to wake up a bride or groom just prior to the ceremony to tell them it is time to begin.

Never has a bride or groom told me, in the hours before the ceremony, *"I'm just so tired."*

There is a dynamic at work in the heart of a man and a woman about to be married that overcomes exhaustion. They are energized by the passion of hearts on fire.

Fire doesn't just happen. Something begins to burn with the right combination of heat, fuel, and oxygen.

And hearts on fire are not spontaneous combustion events, either.

The hearts of a bride and a groom are ignited at the junction of love for each other, a launch into an exciting future, and a defining moment (the wedding).

This morning, we are going to watch a fire start to burn in the hearts of two of Jesus' first disciples. As we watch that, see if your own heart isn't set on fire by the same reality that ignited theirs.

Before we get there, though, let's backtrack from Easter Sunday morning into the scene we left on Friday evening.

Backtracking (Luke 23:50--56)

- Jesus died on Friday.
Jesus was crucified on Friday and was dead by around three in the afternoon. His death was confirmed by the rush of blood and water that poured out of the wound made by a soldier's spear.
- Jesus was buried in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea
Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that had convicted Jesus and turned Him over to Pontius Pilate, asked Pilate for Jesus' body. This Joseph, who was a disciple (John tells us that he was a secret disciple) laid Jesus' body in His own unused tomb, which was a cave hollowed out of the rock.
- The women prepared to embalm Jesus' body.
And then, there were some women who watched where Jesus was buried late on Friday. They marked the spot so that they would know where to return on the first day of the week to complete the work of embalming Jesus' body. After seeing where He was buried, they hurried to the places where they were staying to observe the Sabbath.

We try to imagine the emotions of Jesus' friends during the hours after His death. The Bible doesn't give us much of a window into what they were feeling. But if you've ever lost a loved one, you know.

There is sorrow. Grief. You feel numb. I'm certain that this was how the followers of Jesus felt.

So, Friday was awful. On Friday evening, they would have been inconsolable. Saturday would have been the longest day of their lives.

The only thing keeping the women going was the knowledge that they had this job to do. They had one last thing to do for Jesus.

They would go to the tomb first thing Sunday morning. They would anoint His body.

They had noble intentions...even if they were totally misguided.

After a famous person dies, someone will often write a biography. Biographies always end with a period. Not with a comma.

The only exception to that rule is Jesus. His story wasn't finished at the conclusion of Friday afternoon's execution. There is a comma as we turn to Luke 24 and enter the *continuing story* of Jesus.

The grief-struck women¹ who had watched the burial have come back to Joseph's tomb to perform the task they had given themselves.

It was Sunday morning, probably just before daybreak when they arrived at the tomb with a clear purpose.²

The Wonder of the Old, Old Story (Luke 24:1-12)

News that Proves (vv. 1-8)

A job to do (v. 1)

[1] But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.

They have come to anoint the dead with spices, perfumes, and special oils. It's a plan hatched by love. Clearly, they came to the tomb expecting to find a dead Jesus.

Well, things at the tomb weren't at all what they were expecting.

The women's discovery (vv. 2-3)

[2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb³, [3] but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus⁴.

The massive stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away, which, even if startling, was convenient. They could at least enter the tomb easily.

But when they walked into the cave, they saw that their spices and oils were pointless because...Jesus' body was gone.

You may be able to remember a time when you were so surprised by something that happened, it was so unexpected, came out of nowhere, that you didn't know what to do next.

Like the time, years ago, I was hiking on a trail in an area of the Hill Country yet to be developed when I came to a twist in the trail, looked up...and saw an emu walking toward me.

¹ Before we go any farther in this passage, notice who are the main characters of this scene. Verse 10 refers to Mary Magdalene (the first to see the risen Lord; see 8:2 - Jesus cast seven demons out of her); Joanna, the wife of Chuza; Mary, the mother of James (probably James son of Alphaeus); and other, unnamed women.

² In Jewish usage, the term *"three days and three nights"* 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.

³ A cave, hollowed out from the side of a cliff, with an opening large enough to climb through. We don't know how large the interior may have been.

⁴ Jesus is referred to here as "the Lord Jesus." This is the first time He is given the title Lord, significantly, post-resurrection. He is referred to as "Lord" over a hundred times in the rest of the New Testament.

I'm sure I stared at it - and it stared at me - for a good thirty seconds before it turned around and walked away.

What happened wasn't supposed to happen. I didn't expect to encounter an emu on a Hill Country trail. It took some time to process.

It took some time for these ladies to process what's happened at Joseph's tomb.

Then, while they were gawking, things got really interesting. Two angels showed up. Now, all of a sudden, the tomb was crowded (Not a pleasant thought).

The angels' announcement (vv. 4-7)

[4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in gleaming clothing; [5] and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground...

For most of us, standing in a tomb would be unnerving enough without having two unearthly strangers showed up, unannounced.

The angels spoke. ***[5]... "Why are you seeking the living One among the dead?"***

The angels kept talking and reminded the women of some of Jesus' last words to them.

[6] "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

[7] saying that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men (check...), and be crucified (check...), and on the third day rise from the dead. (check!!!).⁵ (See Luke 9:22; 17:25; 18:32f)

⁵ By ***"risen,"*** the angels certainly didn't mean that Jesus was, in some way, still alive "spiritually." They meant that His physical body had been resurrected, never to taste death, again.

And, just like that, light bulbs went on in the women's minds. Fireworks went off in their spirits as ***[8] they remembered His words.***⁶

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

But their presence at the tomb gave them the honor of being the first to hear the news of the resurrection AND the honor of being the first to announce the resurrection to others.

They ran back into the city with hearts bursting, this time, not with sorrow, but with joy.

"Too Good To Be True" - BUT TRUE! - News! (vv. 9-11)

The women bring good news!

We picture their breathlessness, their eagerness, their enthusiasm. They reported what had just happened to them at the tomb ***"to the eleven, and to all the rest."***⁷

So now, just like that, there are over a dozen believers!

Among the believing we now count several women and the eleven remaining apostles, because, unlike the women, who didn't remember Jesus' words, the apostles did remember and were fully anticipating a resurrection.

Not so fast.

The apostles dismiss the women's report (v. 11)

[11] But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe⁸ the women.⁹

⁶ When He was with them, Jesus would sometimes speak figuratively. Maybe that is how they had been taking His words about resurrection. Now they saw that He had meant to be taken completely literally.

⁷ We know the apostles (minus Judas Iscariot). Then, there would have been Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, several women, and no doubt others, too.

You and I hear things that we don't believe with some regularity. News stories are not uncommonly unbelievable. So, some skepticism is not a bad thing.

But that is not what's going on here. The Bible says here that the men WOULD NOT believe.

What prompted their unbelief was not the unbelievableness of the event. It's something else.

You can almost hear their thoughts: *"I put my trust in Jesus once. I'm not about to do it again. I may get burned once, but not twice."*

They are protecting themselves against yet another devastating disappointment. And we get that.

This kind of a response can kick in after any kind of failure or pain or disappointment, from business to sports to romance.

Our hearts get broken once, or twice - or more times. It hurts. And at some point, we may refuse to try again, or to risk again. We wall off our hearts.

And by doing that, we guarantee that we will never again get hurt. We also guarantee that we will never know the joy of intimacy or the thrill of discovery.

Joy is always going to be out of reach unless we are willing to risk and to be vulnerable, in other words, to trust.

On that first Easter Sunday morning, most of the disciples chose the safer route of not believing - and thereby shut themselves off from joy. They WOULD NOT believe.

Today, don't allow yourself to be caged in by a refusal to trust.

Dare to believe. Dare to imitate the lone exception among the apostles. Dare to be like the disciple who had just denied Jesus three straight times. Be like Simon Peter!

News That Changes Lives! (24:12)

Hearing the women's report, Peter opened himself up to hope. Luke wrote, **[12] Nevertheless, Peter got up and ran to the tomb...**

Enough of this "walk by faith" stuff. Peter didn't walk. He RAN by faith.

When he arrived at the tomb, he stooped down, looked in, and saw an amazing scene. The body definitely was NOT there. And it clearly wasn't the work of grave robbers.

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

Luke tells us that **"he went away to his home marveling at what had happened."**

Now, let's be sure we see what Peter didn't see.

- He didn't see a heavenly vision.
- He didn't see an angel.
- He didn't see Jesus.

Peter believed on the basis of the word of Jesus, the testimony of the women's witness, and the strength of the cold, hard evidence.

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

We can turn to the four independent witnesses - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - and read the very trustworthy promise from Jesus that He would rise from the dead.

And, like Peter, we can go home today, marveling at what happened.

⁸ The word describing their unbelief is the same word that is used at Luke 24:11.

⁹ As has been noticed so many times through the centuries, these men were not on the brink of belief and needing only the shadow of an excuse before launching into a proclamation of resurrection. They were utterly skeptical. Clearly irrefutable evidence was needed to convince these skeptics.

You can go home, today, believing the stunning good news that the same Jesus who died for your sins, also rose from the grave. He now offers you the free gift of eternal life. Believing that, you will go home a child of God!

Happy Easter, indeed!!

Now, we're going to move from that wonderful scene at the tomb to another, somewhat less familiar scene. This is a story that only Luke tells.

I'm eager for us to look at this narrative together because I think it speaks very directly to where many of us find ourselves from time to time - maybe even this morning.

Continuing with the story of what happened on that Sunday, Luke tells us about two of Jesus' not very famous disciples.

They were walking from Jerusalem to a place called Emmaus.

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To Emmaus... (vv. 13-35)

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

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

These two left Jerusalem at some point on Sunday morning - and there are a lot of particulars about this incident we don't know.

One of them was named Cleopas. He isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. His friend is not even named. Nor do we know where "Emmaus" was located, only that it was about seven miles away from Jerusalem.¹⁰

As we catch up to these two, they are deep in discussion.

[14] And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place.

By "***these things***" they were certainly referring to Jesus' last days, His trials, His death and burial. These two men would have still been reeling from the horrors of Friday's crucifixion.¹¹

As they walked and talked, the two became three.

The Two - Joined by a Familiar Stranger (vv. 15-24)

Jesus, incognito (vv. 15-16)

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

We know (because Luke tells us) that this Other, this Stranger, 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.¹²

He had been walking faster than they were, so He caught up with them. And as He walked with them, He spoke.

Jesus' question (v. 17)

[17] What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?"

He was eavesdropping. He asked them to let Him in on their conversation. "***And they came to a stop, looking sad.***"

They took a moment to collect themselves. Then they spoke.

The two explain recent happenings (vv. 18-24)

¹⁰ The name means "warm springs" and could have been one of several places. One of the best guesses is that this Emmaus was about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Lydda which was near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

¹¹ They were traumatized. And trauma is not so easily gotten over. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is not only a modern phenomenon.

¹² Perhaps His glorified body was not immediately recognizable. Or maybe they didn't recognize Him because He didn't want them to recognize Him.

Surprise (v. 18)

[18] And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Have you been living in a cave?"

Not really. What he actually said was, **[18b] "Are You possibly the only one living near Jerusalem who does not know about the things that happened here in these days?"**

The Stranger played along, "What things are you talking about?" So, the two gave their report.

Synopsis (vv. 19-21)

[19]... "Those about Jesus the Nazarene, who proved to be 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 handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and crucified Him."

Notice that they called Jesus a prophet. They weren't being disrespectful. It's an honoring thing to call someone a prophet. But we learn something when we hear them call Jesus a prophet.

They didn't call Him "Messiah." They aren't now thinking that Jesus was the Messiah. Not anymore. Not since Friday afternoon.

[21] "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened."

Did you catch it? **"We were hoping."** Read that, "We're not hoping anymore."

But they do admit to being confused. There are a few strings dangling and they don't quite know how to tie them up nice and neat.

Confusion (vv. 22-24)

[Luke 24:22] "But also some women among us left us bewildered. 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] And so 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. Jesus was still *incognito*. They still don't know who it was who was walking and talking with them.

And His first words don't exactly pass the "How to win friends and influence people" test.

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

[25] And then He said to them, "You 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 come into His glory?" [27] Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He explained to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures.

How long does it take you to walk seven miles? Walking at a pretty good clip, it probably takes you a couple of hours. 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 something 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?

I have to believe that Jesus mentioned the scene in the Garden of Eden where God promised a coming redeemer after Adam and Eve sinned.

And He sure would have told them the story of the *almost* sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's son, which pictured the *actual* sacrifice of God's Son, the Messiah.

He would have explained the sacrificial system as foreshadowing the Messiah's sacrificial death.

Luke tells us that Jesus spoke from “**all the prophets.**”

It is too much to think that Jesus found references to Himself in Isaiah¹³ and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi?

Of course - all the prophets predicted Him.

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

I’m betting that by the time they arrived at Emmaus, these two disciples were convinced that God’s Word is really all about Messiah.

They were probably also beginning to see - as they had NOT seen before - that the life of Jesus fit perfectly with everything that was foretold about the Messiah.

Well, all good things must end, and so this walk comes to an end. The three have reached Emmaus.

Hearts Aflame! (vv. 28-34)

One journey ends (vv. 28-29)

[28] And they approached the village where they were going, and He gave the impression that He was going farther. [29] And so they strongly 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.

You can tell that the two disciples thoroughly enjoyed this Stranger’s company. They wanted more time with Him and He agreed to give them more time.

The day was nearly over, and it was time for the evening meal when they sat down to eat. At this meal, Cleopas and his friend had an eye-opening moment.

¹³ 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.

Another “journey” begins (vv. 30-31)

[30] And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and He broke it and began giving it to them.

You can almost picture them looking back and forth at each other. Then they looked at Jesus.

“Hey, wait a minute, Stranger! That sure looked familiar. Cleopas, do you remember back in Galilee when Jesus fed the five thousand? He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it out the same way. You remind us of Someone...”

And with that - Jesus was gone. He vanished right before their eyes. (Luke 24:31)

Now, listen to what they say right after He left.

Hearts fan into flame (v. 32)

[32] “Were our hearts not burning within us when He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

And with that, they arose (meal uneaten?) and returned to Jerusalem, covering the seven miles like it was a competitive 10K. (Luke 24:33)

They found the rest of the disciples, the eleven plus others, some of whom believed and some of whom didn’t.

Energized!! (vv. 33-34)

They burst into the room and announced, ***[34] “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon!”***

Keep in mind that by now it was late in the evening. These two guys began the day depressed, defeated, downcast, and sad. They have walked fourteen miles on dusty roads.

Now, they are energized! What happened?

Well, the same sort of thing happened to them that happens to brides and grooms on the day of their wedding.

Exhaustion was overcome by events. Something was going on that was so fiery that it consumed tiredness.

The hearts of these two disciples were set on fire by the reality of the resurrection, the spark of hope that was now burning in their hearts, and the fuel of Jesus' life-changing presence and words.

Their hearts were set on fire by the living Lord Jesus.

Allow these truths to perform the same energizing work in your heart that they did in the hearts of the disciples who walked the Emmaus Road.

May this morning be your defining moment. Let the glorious news of Jesus' resurrection set your heart on fire!

He is Risen

He is Risen, indeed!

Conclusion:

God's plan was that His Son, Jesus, would provide for our redemption. He would die for our sins as a sacrifice and then He would defeat death through a glorious resurrection.

This day, the living Jesus invites you to embrace the truth of God's love, poured out on you through His cross. Embrace the uncertain but exciting future God has for you.