

26 April 2020

WHAT'S BEHIND THE CURTAIN? - Prophecy Fulfilled!

Luke 24:13-35

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;

16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.

18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;

21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning

23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.

24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.

29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

32 They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

34 and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”

35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Our Eastertide sermon series, “What’s Behind the Curtain”, continues this week with “Prophecy Fulfilled.”

The “Wizard of Oz” movie throws a real puzzle into the plot when the Wizard tells Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion that they must bring him the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. How are they going to find the witch, get the broomstick, and bring it back?

Puzzles have been in the Coronavirus news. People are filling their “at home” time by buying puzzles in record numbers. NPR reports that the major manufacturers have experienced as much as a 300% increase in sales in March and April and can’t get replacement stock because puzzle making isn’t an “essential industry.” That’s a puzzle on top of a puzzle.

These times we are going through are truly puzzling. We don’t know how to sort it out. What if we had known earlier? What if we had locked down earlier? Would lives have been saved? How do we know?

It reminds me of all the second guessing after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Back then there was a lot of second guessing trying to figure out the puzzle of “Did we know?” “Could we have done anything to stop it?” “Could lives have been saved?” The puzzle was made more difficult because the U. S. did have radar on Oahu, and it was manned on that fateful Sunday morning when the Japanese air armada began their approach over the island. The excited young Army Privates called their superior at Honolulu, reporting what they were seeing. His response is legendary, “They’re just B17’s (a brand new and novel plane). Go eat some breakfast.”

The disciples walking down the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Resurrection Day were puzzled to say the least. And things got really confusing as another joined them.

He asked them what they were talking about. They answered, “Are you the only one from Jerusalem who hasn’t heard how Jesus of Nazareth was the one we thought was the Messiah, how they killed him, and now some women are saying they’ve seen him alive?” At this point

we would expect the newcomer (who WE know is Jesus) to start criticizing them, maybe condemning them. But no, Jesus did what Jesus does. He asked questions and He did not condemn

Jesus asked them, "What were you talking about." I am reminded how Jesus asked questions, even when he knew the answer. In Mark 10, the disciples asked Jesus, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask." At that point Jesus could really have laid into them. Instead he said, "What do you want for me to do?" They wanted to have first and second place in his Kingdom. All Jesus said was, "That's not for me to say." And when the man born blind came up to Jesus (He could see the guy was blind), Jesus still asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus waits for us to decide what we really want.

And Jesus didn't condemn. John 3:17 has Jesus saying, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might have life through him." And in John 8, when the woman caught in adultery was left with him, he says, "Where are those who condemn you?" And then, "Neither do I condemn you either."

What Jesus did was explain the puzzle. Beginning with the Prophets, he sorted out the whole confusing series of events that had been his life.

Beginning with Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 we read, "The LORD will raise up for you a prophet like me from among yourselves, from your own kinsmen. You are to pay attention to him . . . I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I order him." The Prophet Ezekiel, in chapter 37, says, "David my servant (shall be) king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them." (This underscores the importance of the Jesus' genealogies in Luke 3 - 23-38 & Matthew 1 - 1-78) Isaiah declares, in chapter 7, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," and in chapter 9, "For a child has been born to us, a son given to us, and the authority is upon his shoulder, and the wondrous adviser, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, called his name, 'the prince of peace.'"

The puzzle pieces fall into place as we read in Hosea 11, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son," helping us understand the flight of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to Egypt to escape murderous King Herod (and their return after Herod's death).

And we begin to understand why Jesus needed to suffer as we read Isaiah 53, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." And most important, we understand that his rising from the dead was clearly in the prophetic utterance.

The Psalmist declare in Psalm 16, “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay.” And in Psalm 49, “. . . that he should live on forever and not see decay. 15 But God will redeem my life from Sheol, for He will surely take me to Himself.” And Psalm 86, “For great is Your loving devotion to me; You have delivered me from the depths of Sheol.” Finally the Prophet Jonah declares, “To the roots of the mountains I descended; the earth beneath me barred me in forever! But You raised my life from the pit, O LORD my God.”

The story of the journey on the Emmaus Road concludes with two very important actions.

The original two arrived where they were going to stay for the night. Jesus seemed like he was going to keep on going. The Disciples invited him in.

The invitation is the first element of our whole United Methodist understanding of sharing the Holy Meal, our Sacrament of Holy Communion. We are invited to the table, and we welcome and invite all who will join us. Our table is open.

And then, as they were sitting down to eat, Jesus offered to give thanks for the meal, and as he was breaking the bread, their eyes were opened and they saw Jesus (and he disappeared!). We believe that it is in the sharing of the bread and cup, in the giving thanks and the remembering what Jesus had said at the last supper, “When you eat and drink this remember me.” We do not believe that Holy Communion is some kind of miracle. It is a mystery, the mystery of Jesus keeping his promise to be with us, to join us and feast with us “in the breaking of bread.”

This past Saturday, Holy Saturday in the Greek Church (April 18), the Patriarch of Jerusalem entered the shrine of Jesus’ burial place, in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, and came out with blazing candles. The faithful believe it is a miracle. For centuries skeptics have called it a fraud. The Patriarch himself has confessed that he carries a lighter with him and lights the “miracle light.” Why do they need the sham when they can have the real thing?

In the Fall of 1940, the Battle of Britain was raging every night over the cities of England. Every night whole blocks of London would erupt in plumes of fire, smoke, and dust that came “from the time of Cromwell, of Dickens, of Victoria.” And every next day, the new Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s voice would come out of the radio with the encouragement that gave the British the grit and courage to live another day.

So effective we’re Churchill’s broadcasts that the Nazi German propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels recorded in his journal, “When will that creature Churchill finally surrender? England

cannot hold out forever!” (He went so far as to make it illegal for Germans to even listen to Churchill’s broadcasts.)

But Churchill knew that his words alone could not keep Britain standing against the Nazi onslaught. Churchill hoped for word from across the Atlantic, from the United States, from Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But Roosevelt had his own problems. He was in an election year, for an unprecedented third term. He had a Congress that was opposed to U.S. involvement in the War in Europe. So, Roosevelt sent his closest advisor, Harry Hopkins.

Hopkins spent the first few weeks of 1941 with Churchill, touring the devastation of London and the other hard-hit cities. The tour ended in Glasgow, and over dinner, Hopkins spoke (finally). “I suppose you wish to know what I am going to say to President Roosevelt on my return.” Then, quietly, he began from the Book of Ruth. “Whither thou goest, I will go. And where thou lodgest, I will lodge: Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God, even to the end.”

God is our faithful friend. “Yea though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God is with us.” As we welcome, invite, give thanks and remember, Jesus is here, with us. It is no miracle. It is God doing what God does, keeping His promise.