

Two Disciples in Search of a Story

R1 There is a curious play written a few years ago entitled, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The premis is interesting. The play is based on characters who exist but have been abandoned by their author, their story is unfinished and there is no one to give them direction or instruction for how they should conduct themselves on stage. And so they search for an author who will finish them, finish their story and give them meaning.

R2 In a way, a similar situation exists at the end of the gospel of Luke. There are only two characters not six; one named Cleopas and his unnamed friend. They are also troubled because they have lost their story, or at least the story they thought they were in turns out not to be true. Their play might be entitled, *Two Disciples In Search of a Story*. This is how it begins.

I *Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.*

II *As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.*

I *He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him,*

II *"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*

I *"What things?" he asked.*

II *"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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.*

R1 *We had hoped that he was the one.* The sadness in their voices was heavy.

R2 Yet, only a few days ago these two disciples were walking on air, thrilled that their long dreamed for Messiah had finally come. The event all Israel had anticipated for hundreds of years was happening now in their lifetime. Jesus' words echoed through the villages and marketplaces and even the temple with a boldness not heard before. *No one ever spoke like this.* They said. He performed miracles, fed thousands, healed the sick and even raised the dead. Surely the redeemer of Israel has finally come. Surely the Kingdom will now come in a splendor and radiance unseen by David or Solomon in the heights of Israel's glory.

R1 Only a few days before these disciples were walking on air. But much can change in a few days and the events of these last few days brought these two disciples down to earth, their feet back to the ground that was the road to Emmaus and they walk it sadly.

R2 What happened, what went wrong? Everything was going according to the script. Everything pointed to the exciting truth that the climactic chapter of the story of Israel was now being written, the story they had been raised to believe since they were little boys in the Synagogue.

- R1** But now the last pages of their story had a terribly different ending. The plot line took them away from Jerusalem to a lonely hill outside the city. The glittering hopes that had been raised so high came crashing down, shattering on the stony hill of Golgatha. Their story was over or worse, their story had been false all along. So these two disciples are walking on the road to Emmaus, looking for a story wondering what kind of an author writes an ending like this: a cross instead of a crown, an execution instead of a coronation.
- R2** A few days before these two disciples were noble characters in a grand drama, an epoch adventure, a heroic tale.
- R1** Now they are just two bit nobodies in a tragic saga that ends on a hill outside Jerusalem appropriately named the skull.
- R2** The disciples' problem was they placed their hope in a story they had created, not the Lord. Their hope was not in the Lord, but their idea of the Lord, what he would do, should do, must do. But hope that rests in men is no hope at all. Jesus rarely acts according to our scripts. God's script makes that clear. *My ways are not your ways, my thoughts are not your thoughts.*
- R1** There are times, aren't there, when we feel a little like these disciples. We too have a story we've grown up with, a script with clear stage directions for us and for our Lord, how he should act in our lives.
- R2** It's a simple script. We give our lives to Jesus, Jesus takes care of us.
- R1** He makes sure nothing bad happens to us, nothing really bad.
- R2** He makes sure we don't have to face serious illness, no one we love dies prematurely, we have all the money and material things we need.

- R1** We don't demand too much, just enough to make sure, when the last page is turned there's a happy ending.
- R2** And then it happens. The doctor delivers his diagnosis, the phone rings in the middle of the night, the letter arrives and our most dreaded fears becomes reality.
- R1** And like those disciples, we discover our story has been divinely edited, and we find ourselves walking down the road stunned, lost, alone just like Cleopas and his friend.
- R2** The Lord knows how we anguish when we lose the story we hoped for, but he is eager for us to know that troubling chapters do not mean we're not still part of God's grand story. It is written in the script,
- I *In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world.*
- RI** Your story is not over, far from it. Glorious chapters are ahead for you. Do not be afraid. Be still for I am still with you. Joy still awaits you. The troublesome waves and winds of this world still know the voice who rules them.

Be Still My Soul

II In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

I He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:22-27)

R2 Jesus gently rebukes these two disciples for being foolish, a foolishness that is the result of having read the Scriptures wrong. If they were more familiar with the whole story the Bible is actually telling, they would be less frustrated about the particular scene in which they are living. So, beginning with Moses and the Prophets, Jesus tells them the divine saga of salvation that somewhere along the way they missed.

Tell Me the Old, Old Story

R2 I wonder where Jesus began the story. Did he begin with Genesis?

I. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

R1 Or did he start with Abraham?

II *The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*

R2 Or maybe he began with the story of Moses.

I *Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.*

R1 We don’t really know but one thing we do know, Jesus helps them to understand how the events that have so disheartened them, are not a departure from the story of God. Far from it. They are still right in the middle of God’s wonderful story of love.

Wonderful Story of Love

- R1** As Jesus tells them their story, their lives are put into perspective as they are reminded that there is far more to God's story than the scene they are currently in. These Emmaus disciples were reacting to the short window of events that began and ended within the timeline of their own lives.
- R2** But their lives appear only in one act, one scene indeed only a few lines. But because they see their lives as the whole story, they misinterpret the events of their lives. The scriptures help us to see the bigger story that we are a part of.
- R1** And curiously, when we see that bigger story, it makes our own story both less important and more. Less important because we see that there is so much more to God's divine drama than us
- R2** And more important because now we see that we are a part of God's divine drama. And oh what a drama it is!
- R1** When those disciples saw their Messiah on the cross they thought it was the end of their story but it wasn't the end at all. It was the climactic chapter of a story that had begun long ago, long before they had met Jesus, long before Jesus had begun his ministry, long before even Jesus' birth.
- R2** If these disciples had known their scriptures a little better, they would have known that the events of the last weekend were the climactic chapter of a story which God's prophets began telling hundreds of years before.

- II.** *Here the word of the Prophet Isaiah:*
- I** *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.*
- II** *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*
- I** *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*
- II** *Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*
- I** *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.*
- II** *But he was pierced for our transgressions,*
- I** *he was crushed for our iniquities;*
- II** *the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,*
- I** *and by his wounds we are healed.*
- II** *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*
- I** *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ... (Isaiah 53:)*

- II** *Hear the word of the Psalms from David*
- I** *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*
- II** *Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?*
- I** *O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer. I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:*
- II** *"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*
- I** *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*
- II** *Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

- R1** Perhaps, if these disciples had a better grasp of God's story, the events of the weekend would not have taken them by such surprise. They would not find themselves walking so hopelessly down the road. It remains true for us today. Either our story is part of the grand and glorious divine drama, or our story is insignificant and quickly over
- R2** As Shakespeare said. *Out, out, brief candle! Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*
- R1** Ah, but our story is no insignificant tale. It is an ancient story told from the beginning of time, long preserved for us. Ancient words that give us hope, that enable us to walk down whatever roads may be before us, whether it be Emmaus or any other destination God may have ahead of us.

Ancient Words

I *As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly,*

II *"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over."*

I *So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other,*

II *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

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

II *"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."*

I *Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. (Luke 24:28-35)*

R1 And when we break bread with our Lord at the table, our eyes too are opened.

R2 Here we see the climax of our story. Here is where the great mystery written through the ages is finally solved. Here is where the divine romance finally allows the lover to rescue his beloved, here is where the grand odyssey has the king complete his epic journey to restore his kingdom. Here is where Jesus is finally and truly revealed as the hero of our story.

- R1** There were many remarkable moments in the story of Jesus where we see bits of his glory revealed: in the manger, at the river Jordan, on the mountain mysteriously transfigured, triumphantly riding into Jerusalem among the palm waving crowd and shouts of Hosanna. These were glorious moments for sure,
- R2** But they were only moments leading to the climax. We were not saved by Jesus' birth; our sins were not forgiven at Jesus' baptism; we were not transformed by Jesus' transfiguration; the day of our salvation was not when Jesus' rode into Jerusalem seated on a colt. The climax of Jesus' story was the day he stumbled out of the city of David staggering under the weight of an old rugged cross.
- R1** At the table, where the bread is broken and the wine is poured out, we see the true heroic character of Jesus, and we proclaim the storied victory of Jesus over the two enemies against which we were helpless: condemnation and death. The first he defeated at the cross, the second at the tomb.
- R2** These two disciples who had walked with Jesus, despite their hearts burning within them, did not recognize Jesus until he broke bread with them. As we gather around this table and remember again the story that gives our lives meaning, our hearts too burn within us.
- R1** For it is here at this table we celebrate the wonderful, the wonder-filled story of God's love. Here we proclaim the story of a creator God who loved his creation so much he was willing to enter into that creation and die so the creation could enter into him and live.

R2 Here at this table we proclaim such a story of grace such a tale of mercy such a drama of love.

R1 But there is more. For this table proclaims not only the story of Jesus' death, but also his resurrection. It is because of this climactic resurrection chapter in God's story, we have assurance that our lives will be a part of the culminating chapter.

R2 At this table each week we proclaim the story of his death until he comes. What a strange thing to say. Proclaim his death until he comes. What people in their right mind wait for a dead person to return. Only people who belong to the story about a man who died but is not dead, whose departure from this world is only temporary.

R1 Yes, we marvel at the story of Jesus' birth. And we are in awe of the many remarkable stories of his life. But it's the story of the cross and the empty tomb that thrills us most because here is where God's story comes to its great climax and the troubling mysteries of life and death, of sin and salvation of justice and mercy are all finally revealed.

I *Where O death is your victory?*

II *Where O death is your sting?*

I *The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the Law.*

II *But thanks be to God. He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

R2 When the disciples sat with Jesus at the table, saw Jesus break the bread, they truly saw Jesus, truly understood the story most precious.

R1 And so do we.

Tell Me the Story of Jesus

After the Song

- Servers take their place
 - Prayer is offered for bread and it is served;
 - Prayer is offered for cup and it is served;
 - Offering is taken up and prayed for
- Singers and narrator take their places again**

- I** *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them,*
- II** *"Peace be with you."*
- I** *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them,*
- II** *"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."*
- I** *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of (their) joy and amazement, he asked them,*
- II** *"Do you have anything here to eat?"*
- I** *They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them,*
- II** *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

- I** *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them,*
- II** *"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*
- I** *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.* **(Luke 24:36-53)**

- R1** The story of the Cross and the Resurrection created a community of storytellers, ready and eager to tell this incredible tale to all the world.
- R2** And they did, with boldness, because they were witnesses: witnesses of the risen Jesus, witnesses of the fulfilled Scriptures, witnesses of the ascension and witnesses of the promise of the Spirit that was to come and that did come.
- R1** And as every good witness should do, they gave testimony.

R2 *From the Testimony of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved:*

I *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched --this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, (1John 1:1-3)*

R1 *From the testimony of Peter, the first to confess Jesus as Messiah*

II *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. (2Pet. 1:16-19)*

R1 This community of storytellers entered the world filled with the indwelling presence of Jesus and armed with little more than an outrageous story. Against unimaginable odds, that original band of maybe 100 disciples faithfully told the story of the Cross and the Christ no matter what it would cost them. And it would cost them a great deal. From the tradition of the Church we are told their fates.

- I** **Stephen**, cast out of the city and stoned to death.
- II** **James**, the brother of John, beheaded.
- R1** **Philip**, scourged, thrown into prison, and crucified.
- R2** **Matthew**, slain with an axe.
- II** **James the Less** beaten and stoned to death at the age of ninety-four
- R2** **Matthias**, stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.
- I** **Andrew**, the brother of Peter, crucified.
- R1** **Bartholomew**, beaten and then crucified.
- I** **Jude** the brother of James, crucified.
- II** **Peter**, crucified upside down in Rome
- R1** **Paul** beheaded by Nero in Rome.
- II** **Mark**, dragged to pieces by the people of Egypt.
- R2** **Thomas**, thrust through with a spear in India
- I** **Luke** hanged on a tree in Greece.
- R1** **Simon**, crucified in Britain
- R2** **And John** the "beloved disciple," cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, escaping miraculously only to be banished to the Isle of Patmos,

- R1** Over the next two thousand years believers in Christ overcame the odds, the unspeakable persecutions to become a world-wide community of storytellers. With only about 100 believers in a world of 300 million souls, in less than 5 generations Christianity became the official story of the empire. And from that time until now an estimated 70 million believers have been martyred for that story, 45 million in the 20th century alone.
- R2** In every country and century since the Cross the gates of Hell haven't had a prayer of resisting the relentless march of God's people across the world and down through time. These historic witnesses not only brought the good news to every era and area of the world, they also brought freedom to those enslaved by tyrannies,
- R1** Compassion to the outcast and dying, generous provision to the poor, sacrificial giving to the victims of disaster,
- R2** Loving homes to the orphaned and abandoned, advanced technology to the primitive, enlightenment to the scholarly,
- R1** Glorious music, breathtaking art, inspirational literature and on and on the list could go. Though their story gave assurance of a new heaven and a new earth, it also told of a Messiah whose love and compassion did not wait for the new world to arrive before he poured out his love on this broken one now.
- R2** And here we are today, over 2000 years and 7000 miles from that lonely road to Emmaus where two sad and forlorn disciples and their fellow believers were wondrously transformed by the presence of the resurrected Jesus. And what shall be said of us by future generations if the Lord tarries?

R1 We too are armed with the same incredible story; we too are indwelt by the same invisible presence; we too have the same commission to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name to all the nations.

What will be said of us?

R2 Will our world and our time see Jesus among them as his story continues in us? Will the chapter that is our life tell about the poor and the outcast and the suffering and the rejected and the oppressed finding the hope and justice and mercy that Jesus came to give?

R1 What will be said of us? Will we be people who know the story, the whole story, the glorious beginning, the climax at the cross. Will we be daily transformed to be faithful storytellers in our day as were those who went before us? Let it be said of us, when our part in the story is told by future believers, that we too were faithful.

Let it Be Said of Us

Prayer

Announcements & Closing

O Master Let Me Walk With Thee