

How Do You Know?

Luke 24:13-35, Acts 5:27-32

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¹All things considered, it was a lousy day. I mean, I am sure that these fellows had had lousy days before, but my hunch is this was the lousiest of days.

Their friend had died -- he had been set up by the powers that be, actually. It was a kangaroo court -- no real justice at all. But more than being grief-stricken at the loss of a friend; more than the anger and indignation that came from the failure of the judicial process, there was just a sense of lost-ness for these two men. Because in addition to being their friend, he was their leader. Their teacher. He had called to them several years ago. "Follow me", he said. And they had. They had walked away from their jobs -- good jobs -- and from their comfortable lifestyles. They had left their material comforts. They really believed that he was the Messiah.

They couldn't help but think, "If Jesus really was who he said he was, none of this would have happened."

To make things worse, there had been some sort of grave robbery - his body had apparently been taken from the tomb, and some of their other friends were evidently hallucinating and making up crazy stories.

And to cap it all off, it was the first day of the week. Yes, I know you think of it as Sunday, but in that culture, it was the day *after* the Sabbath. It was a work day. And here

¹ Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1918), *Gang nach Emmaus*

we find Cleopas and his friend leaving Jerusalem, walking the seven miles to Emmaus, looking, I suppose, for work. Trying to re-enter a world that they thought they had left for good. Wondering what they would say about the three-year gap on their resumés, what they would say to their families, and how they might re-enter life in the village.

It was the lousiest of days.



²And in the midst of this particularly lousy day, a stranger approaches. He wants to talk. At first, the men try to make non-committal grunts and send various messages through the use of body

language. They try to ignore him. But He won't be deterred. He wants to talk religion with them. That's just what I like, when I have a headache and I get on the bus or an airplane and the guy next to me starts to talk about his faith....

But slowly, against their wills, perhaps, these men are drawn in by the stranger. He begins to explain the story to them -- he points out how it wasn't like they thought it was at all. He was telling the truth, he was saying things that were right -- but they had never thought of them that way before.

And then the night falls and the journey ends. The day is no less lousy -- they still have nothing, they still must find a new life; but somehow, something is different. They exchange glances and say, "You know, the least we could do is invite him to stay the night. No need for him to go to a motel."



They gather at the table and gesture to the religious fellow. "You go ahead and say grace", they say. "It's our custom, after all. But you say

Gerloff (1992), *Emmaus*

it. Neither one of us feels very religious about now.”

And then the stranger disappears. And, oddly enough, the two men don't seem to comment on his disappearance. They don't care. They don't even think twice. Because now they KNOW. It makes total sense to them. They KNOW who he was.

And so in a heartbeat this lousy day is transformed into the best of days. These two formerly worn-down and bedraggled men have a new spring in their step as they hustle back to Jerusalem and seek to tell what they know to the others. That seven miles that seemed to drag all afternoon is measured in a heartbeat on the return trip.

They want to tell what they know. They *have* to tell what they know.

And as I reflect on this compulsion to share what they've come to know, I think about how it is that we know *anything*. It seems to me that there are three ways of knowing, or maybe three times when we can know a thing. I'm talking about a concept known as “epistemology”, that branch of philosophy which seeks to understand “how do we know what we know?”

We can know something in anticipation of it actually occurring. We can know it in REHEARSAL, if you will. Let's say a couple comes to me and wants to get married. They know something about marriage already. And we meet, and meet, and meet some more, and we set a date. And we begin to get a picture for what the wedding will be like. And we even have a rehearsal. We know what the songs will sound like, who will stand where, say what, etc. We know who will be here for the event. We know what's going to happen.

In the same way, when it comes to walking with Jesus, many of us know a great deal. We grow up in rehearsal. We know that Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. We know that God loves me the way I am, that God watches over us. We've been told that forever. It has been rehearsed into our lives, some of us.

In a deeper sense, though, an event is not fully known until it is REALIZED. That is to say, we know something as it is occurring. To go back to our friends at the wedding, we could say that the rehearsal prepared them but they really know that they are getting married when they stand up front with me and hear the scriptures, say the vows, light the candles, and so on.

And in our faith, at least for some of us, that's how it is. We have undeniably seen God's hand in our lives. We felt the healing, we heard the voice, we knew the Presence. It wasn't just what we learned about back in Sunday School – it was the Lord, and the Lord had come to us.

But let's be honest. We've all been to weddings where concentration on the marriage at hand is virtually impossible. The bride has had a fight with her mother that's left them both in tears; the groom is shocked to see how many people there are in the room; the flower girl is crying; the soloist forgets the words to the song -- there are any number of reasons that even as the marriage is being realized, it is not fully known -- there are just too many distractions, too much confusion, so much business.

And our lives, if we're honest, are more often like that. We are sidetracked by pain or illness. We think of how we have been trained, of the "rehearsals" that we've been put through, and we think, "There's no way that this could be true. Jesus loves me? How could that be? God is good?"

Are you sure?" Sometimes, even as the event is occurring, we cannot know it fully. It's just too confusing.

The third way to know something is through REFLECTION or RECOLLECTION. We look back on the thing for which we have rehearsed and which has, in fact, been realized, and we say, "Oh, I get it. I see now."

Our wedding couple, for instance, somehow makes it through the wedding day. They go to the reception, hop on the cruise, and take a well-deserved vacation. Four weeks after they get home, they get a package from the photographer. They watch a video. They see the film. They read the cards that came with the gifts. Maybe she practices signing her new name. And then, as they share breakfast together, it hits them. "Holy smokes! We're married. We're really married!"

Those of us who are followers of Jesus of Nazareth know how that can be. WE remember what has been said and when; we recollect the ways that it has affected us. We can, in faith, look back on the lives we've led and say, "I have seen the hand of God at work. I didn't always understand it, but I know now that God was in control the whole way through. He has not left me."

But that's not what always happens, is it? Sometimes, we still feel left alone.

When it comes to matters of faith, sometimes the theories of epistemology fall short. Sometimes, no matter how great the rehearsal, what the process of realization or pattern of remembrance – we just can't grasp it. We don't know. And it hurts.

Years ago I sat in a delivery room of a hospital. Two of my best friends in the whole world had been told that they'd

not be able to have another child. Yet against all odds, she got pregnant. They told her to expect a rough pregnancy. For three months, she was in the hospital. Then, they said, "You're in the clear. The baby is fine. Any day now, you'll have a healthy child. Congratulations." And then something happened. We still don't know what. But all I know is that it was a Friday afternoon and here I am holding their daughter. Who has died. And the miracle of life that they had anticipated is nothing but a cruel hoax.

And in that delivery room I looked at Jesus and I said, "If you really were who you said you were, none of this would have happened."

I bet that many, if not all of you, know how it feels to be looking heavenward and shaking a fist and wishing that this day, this week, this life wasn't so lousy. You hear the story about the walk to Emmaus, and it all makes sense to you – right up to the point where everything gets all better for them. If only things got all better for you, you think, then you could know.

Not long after the baby died, I found a poem, called "Resurrection". I know that I've printed this in the newsletter before, and I have some copies with Sharon in the back if you'd like one. Listen:



Long, long, long ago;
Way before this winter's snow
First fell upon these weathered fields;
I used to sit and watch and feel
And dream of how the spring would be,
When through the winter's stormy sea
She'd raise her green and growing head,
Her warmth would resurrect the dead.

Long before this winter's snow
I dreamt of this day's sunny glow
And thought somehow my pain would pass
With winter's pain, and peace like grass
Would simply grow. The pain's not gone.
It's still as cold and hard and long
As lonely pain has ever been,
It cuts so deep and far within.

Long before this winter's snow
I ran from pain, looked high and low
For some fast way to get around
Its hurt and cold. I'd have found,
If I had looked at what was there,
That things don't follow fast or fair.
That life goes on, and times do change,
And grass does grow despite life's pains.



Long before this winter's snow
I thought that this day's sunny glow,
The smiling children and growing things
And flowers bright were brought by spring.
Now, I know the sun does shine,
That children smile, and from the dark, cold,
grime

A flower comes. It groans, yet sings,
And through its pain, its peace begins.

Have you ever felt like if Jesus really was who he said he was, that none of your pain would have happened? The only thing I can say is to tell you do what Cleopas and the other disciple did. You see, when all that they had rehearsed seemed senseless; when they thought that they had realized the worst; and when all their recollections were tinged with



pain; the only way that they could have known the power of Jesus -- the only way that they could have KNOWN that all of it was true, was to somehow keep close to that stranger on the road. To go. To somehow keep listening, keep talking, keep giving Jesus chances to take, give thanks, break, and sustain them.

Luke says, and I believe him, that Jesus' desire is to be made known to you. Can you lay hold of the truth that God has reached into your story, your past, and has put you here this day? Like the earliest disciples, all we have to go on is an empty tomb. And today, we're walking along the road, talking about how we didn't think we were going to end up here. People say that he's alive. But it seems like a fairy tale – and it seems pretty disconnected with our lives. What do you think about that? Where will you go with that?

Beloved in Christ - he is risen, just as he said! Jesus has risen. He has risen indeed.