

No Better Than a Horse? Luke 24:13-35

Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Third Sunday of Easter (April 30,) 2017

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even 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 as the women had said, but him they did not see." ²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"³³ And they rose that same hour and

returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Our THEME in preaching during this season of EASTERTIDE is what Janet introduced in last week's sermon: **WITNESSING**. The problem, however, is that we cannot testify to what we have not witnessed, if we have not observed things going on.

As I encountered this Gospel message today, two of the questions asked of me are:

1. What kept Cleopas and the other disciple from seeing Jesus?
2. What keeps me from seeing Jesus in my presence, now, on a daily basis.

[Explain blinders on a horse??] Were Cleopas and his friend no better than a horse, wearing blinders, seeing only what was in a narrow field of vision?

There once was a scientist who studied frogs. One day, the scientist put the frog on the ground and told it to jump. The frog jumped four feet.

So the scientist wrote in his notebook, "Frog with four feet, jumps four feet."

Then the scientist cut off one of one of the frogs legs. The scientist told the frog to jump. Frog jumped three feet. So the scientist wrote in his note book, "Frog with three feet, jumps three feet."

The scientist next cut off the second leg. He told the frog to jump. The frog jumped two feet. So the scientist wrote in his notebook "Frog with two feet, jumps two feet."

The scientist cut off one more leg. He told the frog to jump. Frog jumped one foot. So the scientist wrote in his notebook, "Frog with one foot, jumps one foot."

So the scientist cut off his last leg.

"He said, "Frog jump. Frog jump. FROG JUMP!"

So the scientist wrote in his notebook, "Frog with no feet, goes deaf."

1. What kept Cleopas and the other disciple from seeing Jesus?
2. What keeps me from seeing Jesus in my presence, now, on a daily basis.
3. **We tend to only find what we are looking for, and, thus, we often miss so much else.**

Twenty-four years ago, Bishop S. Clifton Ives came to visit my seminary. He read this scripture and told us about a time only a few weeks removed from that day when he went for a run. (He is, to the best of my knowledge, still, in retirement, a runner.) It was immediately after he left the funeral for his father. He took off his suit, put on his running attire and took a run around the lake by their house. The distance was seven miles – the same distance as from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As he ran, his eyes were opened. As he ran, he was able to see life and his father in ways that he had never seen before. It was a shame that it did not happen until after his father died. But he was glad that it *did* happen. His life, his father's life, Jesus, and the life-death continuum were opened to him in ways that forever changed his life.

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Sherlock Holmes (the literary creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) is famous for saying that **when you have eliminated the impossible, the truth is what remains, regardless of how improbable it may seem.**

A more contemporary literary detective, named Dirk Gently (the creation of Douglas Adams) says that he differs from Holmes, because he does not like to eliminate the impossible. It is far more likely, Dirk Gently says, that if you eliminate the improbables and what remains is the impossible, the Truth is probably found right there in the impossible.

Dirk Gently is a different kind of detective, largely because he fiercely believes in the interconnectedness of all things. But he does point out one of the inextricably true facts of life: **We deem many things impossible just because we have not seen them before.**

To Cleopas and his friend, a living conversation with someone whom they **knew** was dead would simply have been impossible.

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In his landmark book (and which I have quoted in the past two years more than any book except the Bible) ***Righteous Minds – Why Reasonable People Differ over Religion and Politics***, Jonathan Haidt explains that we **all have our own elephant**: Our elephant is the sum total of our “truths” – our prejudices, what we will allow is impossible, what we believe is good, what we hold onto as our deepest, dearest principles. The “mind,” Haidt explains sits atop the elephant, like the little man who sits on its head between the elephant’s ears, and whose whole task in life is to steer the elephant in ways consistent with its beliefs.

He gives this example: Picture the Press Secretary for the President of the United States. (You don’t have to picture Sean Spicer; any press secretary for any President works nicely.) When was the last time you saw a reporter ask a question and the press secretary pauses and then calls out, “Oh my God! We never thought about it that way. I must go back and talk to the President so we can change our policy on this. Thank you so very much”?

How the press secretary handles all the questions on behalf of the president is the way our brain handles most all of our life situations, on behalf of our elephant of beliefs and prejudices.

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In our lives today, we **live in a problem solving culture**. We deal with primarily two things: (1) problems and (2) issues. The same can be largely said about the Church as much as the rest of society.

We even have people who teach preachers that we ought to preach **topical sermons** – that is don't begin with the scripture, but start with problems and issues in people's lives and then go find scripture that will help them "SOLVE" those problems and issues. That is how you will be an "effective preacher" ... translation "get more people into your church and save your church from joining the other declining churches."

As a result, when most all of what we see are (1) problems and (2) issues, we are like the person whose only tool is a hammer. **When all you have is a hammer then all of the world looks pretty much like a nail.**

What would it be like, if instead of seeing everything as (1) problem and/or (2) issue, we saw life in terms of **RELATIONSHIPS**.

Think how your life, our lives, our country, our church would be different if

- Instead of listening for solutions, we listened **in hopes of understanding**
- What if: Instead of turning situations into problem-solving scenarios, with some folks winners and some folks losers, we **focused on the relationships between the people who differed**

- What if: Instead of sorting out all the facts and possible solutions, we looked for the **MYSTERY** intrinsic in the situation. *Perhaps one of the very greatest losses of our time is our near absolutely total aversion to any sense of MYSTERY.* We **must** figure everything out if we are going to succeed, we have come to believe. Thank God that Cleopas and his friend allowed for some mystery. Thank God that Cleopas and his friend eventually followed the thinking of Dirk Gently instead of Sherlock Holmes, who surely would have turned the Emmaus Road experience into something other than Resurrection, because that is impossible.
- What if, instead of evaluating everything and every person we encounter to determine if they are good or bad ... if, instead of deciding who and what is entitled to reward, and who and what is entitled to punishment or loss ... we instead remembered Jesus' Voice saying:

“... [B]e [children] of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:44-46)

and then, in our not making judgments on good and bad, perhaps we would be able to see Jesus in the people around us. In the people around us who, like us, were made in the very image of God.

1. What kept Cleopas and the other disciple from seeing Jesus?
 2. What keeps me from seeing Jesus in my presence, now, on a daily basis.
 3. **We tend to only find what we are looking for, and miss so much else – so much so, because we are so busy judging what is worthy and what is not; who is worthy and who is not.**
- What if instead of closing our eyes and ears, hearts and minds to what we think is “good” and “bad,” ... “possible” and “impossible” ... we were

open to the Mystery of the very Kingdom of Heaven in our midst. **And what if we LOOKED FOR THE RISEN JESUS everywhere we went.** ... because each one of them is made in the image of God, the same as us. And loved by God just as much as we are. Just what kind of difference would that make in your life? In my life? In our life together?

There is much in life that I do not understand. I'm hearing Jesus tell me that this is OK. I don't have to solve all of it. I don't have to judge nearly so much as I keep doing. In fact, just this week, I realized from listening to the Very Voice of Jesus: **"I don't know what it all means, so I'd better start paying more attention."**

So, I'm in hopes we will each be better than a horse wearing blinders, and will not be blinded to the very presence of Jesus in and amongst us.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
AMEN.