

***THE ROAD: Two for the Road.***  
*Luke 24:13-14 Ogden Dunes Community Church*  
*May 4, 2014*  
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It was a bright, sunny afternoon in Fort Worth, Texas. I was on my way to the Dallas-Worth Airport to catch a flight back to Indiana. While I was at a conference in Fort Worth a former member of our staff had passed away, and I was headed back for the funeral. It would be a quick trip back to Indiana, and then I would turn around and head back to the conference in Texas.

I was traveling alone. I enjoy doing that, sometimes. I read. I watch people. I do email. Traveling alone gives me time to think. I was traveling alone. It was okay.

When I started to check in, I noticed the lines at every airline counter were unusually long. The monitors in the terminal were suddenly showing "Delayed" or "Cancelled" next to many flight numbers.

People were not happy. I happened to be standing next to an assistant football coach from Notre Dame. I think he was the most unhappiest traveler of all, and he was letting people know he was unhappy.

For a couple of hours we were together. For a couple of hours we talked about football and life and our families and work, as we were shuttled back and forth from terminal to terminal, airline counter to airline counter.

Finally, when we found out that our flight would not go out until about 9:30 -four hours later- he exploded. Stormed around. Declared that it was unacceptable and he didn't want to get home that late. I decided I would rather wait in an airport restaurant and read, watch airplanes, in peace and quiet than put up with that stormy character for the rest of the day.

Traveling alone was going to be simpler.

We're in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, as we were last week. This last chapter of the Gospel of Luke tells the story of the resurrection. A large portion of the chapter tells the story of two travelers on the road to Emmaus.

Last weekend we began this series we're calling ***THE ROAD***. We're talking about what it means to walk with the Risen Christ.

Last weekend we discovered that to walk with Christ means we remember the words he spoke. I wondered with you if we know the words of Jesus well enough to remember them, and we considered what it might look like if each day each one of us grounded our living and thinking in the Jesus we know in scripture.

If we took the time to learn the story of Jesus, and the words of Jesus, so we could remember them as we go along, how would we live differently? So that the words of Jesus we remember become a source of strength and wisdom for us.

**What words of Jesus do you remember, and what words guide you...shape your life...help you live out the resurrection?**

Our symbol last week was the Bible. To remind us of the importance of remembering the words of Jesus.

Our symbol today is a **soccer jersey**. Soccer is a game where everyone is involved in the action. Our symbol isn't a golf club or a pair of running shoes because you can play golf or run all by yourself. Soccer is a team sport. And traveling the road with Jesus means playing the game of life with other people...living in community.

In today's reading Luke shifts from telling us about the women discovering the empty, open tomb of Jesus and the gospel writer begins telling us about the two people traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Why does Luke tell us there are two travelers on the road? Details are important in most stories, you know.

One reason Luke tells us there are two travelers on the road to Emmaus may be because the Gospel writer knew how tempting it is to try and do life on our own.

Life is simpler when you are on your own. There is never a misunderstanding if you stay in your own little world. That's tempting, isn't it?

I can see traveling alone. When you're with other people, now and then people are going to disagree. Sometimes that disagreement will become disagreeable. The United Methodist Bishop in Alabama heard that a 9-1-1 call had gone in from one of his congregations. Seems that people during a Church Council meeting had a disagreement. One person threw a punch and then another person hit back. Folks started throwing things at one another. Some of the church leaders were rolling around on the floor. So the sheriff showed up and settled things down and told folks to go home. I see traveling alone. When you travel with someone else, when you are a part of a community, there are going to be times of disagreement. You say "tomato" and they say "toma-toe."

I see traveling alone. Because when you travel with others there is a risk they are really going to get to know you. You learn things about people. It can be embarrassing to get so close to other people that they know the real you. I'll always remember an 82-year old member of the church in New Haven, where I was serving, telling me after I had been there six or seven months, "I haven't heard a critical word about you, Pastor." "Just give 'em, Non," I said. "Just give 'em time." About two years later, Mona came up to me before worship. She stood by my side and said, "You know how I told you people weren't saying a critical word about you?" she commented. I nodded. "Well, sir," she said, "they're sure talking now!"

When we travel together, when we room together, when we worship together, when we have a difference of opinion in the choir or Session, when we do life together, people get to see us and know us.

They discover we are human.

They discover we make mistakes.

They discover we get tired.

They discover we are tempted and fail.

They discover we have questions we can't answer...at least not today.

We're told there are two travelers on the road, and it is a reminder that when we do life with Jesus we are choosing to do life in community.

Christ calls us into a life where we do life together. We play the game together. (Remember...the soccer jersey?)

Here are three things worth remembering, when we are nudged by God to live the resurrection life in community.

First, we were created to be together. The creation story in Genesis lets us hear God say, "It is not good for the man...to be alone."

St. Paul, over and over again (1st Corinthians 12, Romans 12) uses the image of a body to represent the church. Paul knew we would get frustrated with one another. The apostle knew the hand would want to get rid of the foot, and the ear would get upset with the eyes, but we are a part of one body, Paul says. The Presbyterians will get upset with the Lutherans, the Baptists will mutter about the Catholics, the Session may get irritated with the choir, a congregation may snip at the denominational leaders, but we were created to be in community...travel the road together with others.

Second, there is joy in being together.

I've mentioned to you, before, what it is like to sing in St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem. The small church building produces a kind of acoustical miracle, blending the voices of those who are singing into a special kind of harmony.

Even years after I was in Jerusalem, I remember the joy of being together in those few minutes in St. Anne's Church. All of us, from different backgrounds, different ages, different political persuasions, men and women, devout and curious, we offered our voices up and together we made music that was beautiful!

Community can bring frustration and conflict into our lives, but at its best community -doing life with others- can bring deep joy.

Our youngest son, Michael, rowed for IU crew. It was a club sport. None of the male rowers got any scholarship help.

The rowers would get out to Lake Lemon very early in the morning, Michael told us as we sat at Cafe Pizzaria on Kirkwood. "We would get there as the sun was coming up, and sometimes there would be a heavy fog just above the surface of the water. We would take the shell out on the water, and start rowing. Sometimes we couldn't see more than ten or twenty yards in front of our shell.

"Every now and then," Michael said quietly as he began to roll a glass cheese container on the table top, "our oars or sculls would enter the water at the same instand and at the perfect angle. There was this perfect harmony. It was perfect. And I rowed for those moments, not because we might win a race at a regatta."

When we are together, there can be joy in that.

The players on the soccer team in *Ted Lasso* discovered that.

The members of the Chancel Choir and the Handbell Choir have discovered that: there are these moments when we are all together, just where we are supposed to be, and there is a joy in that. (*I hunch that is one reason why they show up for rehearsal...*)

Life together can be messy and awkward but there is joy in it.

Third, and finally, we can get more done together than we can on our own.

When people look back at the struggle for civil rights in our country, one of the stories that sometimes gets forgotten is the role of faith and the church in all of that. Many of the people who led the march for voting rights, who led the way across the bridge in Selma, Alabama, were preachers of the gospel and followers of Jesus. Many

of the hospitals in our country were founded by Presbyterians, Methodists, and Catholics who felt God's call to provide health care for all people. Many of the health care initiatives for children were begun -and continue to be led- by the followers of Jesus working together: volunteering, showing up, writing letters.

Together we can do things we could never have done alone. Together we discover that Jesus has this way of showing up wherever two or three are gathered together in his name.

Two or three or four...five or six...for the road.

Look at this video...that reminds us what we can do together that we might never dream of doing alone. (*Video of Amish men lifting and moving a barn,...*)

The other evening I saw this video footage of a house being moved in an Amish community. The finished frame and roof of a home was moved into place, located on the foundation, by fifty or so Amish men who crawled beneath the frame and stood up. Half-bent over, they lifted that house and walked it across a yard and turned it so it was right where it needed to be. Something happens when we do life together. Things change. Things happen when we move together instead of letting our fears keep us apart.

Two for the road. We were made to travel together.

What barns of injustice, what barns of poverty, what barns of disconnection with God, what barns of racism, what barns of despair, does God want us to lift and move?

One Thursday morning I ended up on the phone for 45 minutes with a friend. As we talked I walked around the parking lot outside the church offices, where I served, and I paced up and down the sidewalk. We talked about his daughters and he told me how he is working to make a \$15,000,000 dream a reality for an inner city YMCA.

And then, before we ended the call, he told me he loved me. "Every time I think of you," he said, "I smile and my day gets better." And my day was better. My life is better because of our friendship. He knows me, he knows some of my secrets, he knows how funny I can be and how scared I can be and how tired I can be and how weak I can be, and he has chosen to be my friend. I'm blessed.

"Now on the same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus."

It is often in community that God works to save us...or God uses us to find and heal others.

Barbara Brown Taylor tells this story:

*Several summers ago I spent three days on a barrier island where loggerhead turtles were laying their eggs. One night while the tide was out, I watched a huge female heave herself up on the beach to dig her nest and empty her eggs into it. Afraid of disturbing her, I left before she had finished. The next morning I returned to see if I could find the spot where her eggs lay hidden in the sand. What I found were her tracks leading in the wrong direction. Instead of heading back out to sea, she had wandered into the dunes, which were already as hot as asphalt in the morning sun.*

*A little ways inland I found her exhausted, all but baked, her head and flippers caked with dried sand. After pouring water on her and covering her with sea oats, I fetched a park ranger who returned with a jeep to rescue her. He flipped her on her back, wrapped tired chains around her front legs, and hooked the chains to a trailer hitch on his jeep. Then I watched horrified as he took off, yanking her body forward so that her mouth filled with sand and her neck bent so far back I thought it would break.*

*The ranger hauled her over the dunes and down onto the beach. At the ocean's edge, he unhooked her and turned her right side up. A wave broke over her; she lifted her head slightly, moving her back legs. Other waves brought her further back to life until one of them made her light enough to find a foothold and push off, back into the ocean. Watching her swim slowly away and remembering her nightmare ride through the dunes, I reflected that it is sometimes hard to tell whether you are being killed or saved by the hands that turn your life upside down.*

Somehow God has this way of using us to find one another when we've gone the wrong direction. Headed off towards the sand rather than back towards the sea. God has this way of using other people, in community, to turn us right side up.

"Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus."