

**ONE MORE LESSON FROM THE TABLE
(or, “We Do Not Have to Be Afraid of Death.”)**

Luke 24:13-35; NRSV)

April 6, 2008 – 3rd Sunday of Easter

Oakland Avenue PCUSA – Rock Hill, SC

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Luke 24:13-35 NRSV

- 13 *Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,*
- 14 *and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.*
- 15 *While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,*
- 16 *but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*
- 17 *And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.*
- 18 *Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”*
- 19 *He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,*
- 20 *and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over 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 took place.*
- 22 *Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,*
- 23 *and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed 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 they did not see him.”*
- 25 *Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!*
- 26 *Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”*
- 27 *then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*
- 28 *As they came near to the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.*
- 29 *But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.*

- 30 *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.*
- 31 *Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*
- 32 *They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"*
- 33 *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.*
- 34 *They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!"*
- 35 *Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Several weeks ago here in this Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church sanctuary, I told you that if I could tell you only one thing in my year of service with you it would be this: **We do not have to be afraid of death.**

I believe that one of the most freeing and liberating and emancipating truths that a person can hear is this: **We do not have to be afraid of death.**

Other than the Sovereignty of God, if there is any Presbyterian doctrine which is the most important, it is this: **We do not have to be afraid of death.**

Now, I do not know why it is so, but down through the ages most of humanity has feared death. My guess is that it is really a fear of the unknown; we are afraid of anything with which we are not familiar. Do you think that is true?

Leon Uris' book entitled Trinity is a historical novel set in the land of Ireland. It puts in historical perspective the hatred and hostility between Protestants and Roman Catholics in that country. The two main characters in the novel are two Roman Catholic boys who grow up together and then separate as each goes in a different direction during his adult life.

Perhaps one of the most gripping thrusts of the novel is the way in which the characters in the story continually are haunted by the reality of death: death from starvation during the great potato famine; death from old age; death from the fire in an overcrowded and dilapidated factory; death from the fury of an angry mob of people.

One of the interesting things about the two main characters, *Seamus O'Neal* and *Connor Larkin* is that even though they seem to be surrounded by death throughout their lives, they never give evidence that they are afraid of death! They are too familiar with death to fear it!

Now, as your Interim Pastor, I am telling you that **“We do not have to be afraid of death,”** not because we are so familiar with death that we do not fear it, but rather, **“We do not have to be afraid of death”** because we are familiar with the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and *the good news of the Easter Season is that God in Jesus Christ has overcome death and the grave!* THAT is why we are gathered here today.

We do not have to be afraid of death!

Do you believe that in your heart of hearts?

Today’s passage in the Gospel of Luke tells about two of Jesus’ followers as they are walking down the road to Emmaus on the first Easter Sunday afternoon. *Cleopas* and *his unnamed friend* are not pictured here as being afraid. Rather, they are shown more as *perplexed* and *confused* and *amazed* and *bewildered* and *baffled*.

In the comfort and safety of our 21st century perspective, one wonders WHY they could not understand what had happened. For, had not Jesus Himself told them again and again what was going to happen? And had not the Holy Scriptures of the Jews said again and again that the Messiah who would come would come as a suffering servant?

Another intriguing thing about *Cleopas* and *his unnamed friend* on that Emmaus Road is that they did not recognize Jesus at first. Some have written that they were walking westward into the sun, and the sun in its brightness shadowed the face of Jesus.

Others have felt that they were deep in their confusion and grief so much that they were not paying attention to anything.

And still others hold that because they did not expect the resurrection they simply dismissed from their minds any possibility of ever seeing Jesus again.

Personally, I like the way that the gospel writer Luke puts it:

“But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

I often wonder if I would recognize Jesus.

Do YOU ever have thoughts such as that? Do you think that you may have missed Jesus while you were “passing the peace” earlier in the service today?

In today’s passage from the Gospel of Luke there is another intriguing part of the tale. Listen:

*“When he was at table with them,
he took the bread and blessed and broke it
and gave it to them.*

And their eyes were opened and they recognized him...”

(Luke 24:30-31)

I often wonder if I would recognize Jesus.

Do YOU ever have thoughts such as that? Do you think that you may have missed Jesus while you were “passing the peace” earlier in the service today?

There is an invitation to you and to me to gather around this Holy Table this morning with Jesus. I encourage you in faith to do so. And it is my prayer that our eyes will be opened and we will recognize Jesus.

Don't YOU long for that?