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Open Our Eyes
Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called **Emmaus**, about seven miles^[l] 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.**^[g]

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,^[l] 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.**^[l] 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^[l] 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 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^[k] 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.

Did you know it's *still Easter?*

The Easter season lasts for **50 days**—all the way to **Pentecost**, the day the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' followers, forming the early church. That happens this year on May 28th!

So we are *still celebrating the resurrection of Jesus!*

On Easter I mentioned N.T. Wright's great book, *Surprised by Hope*, and how he says that we should celebrate Easter for a long time, because **without the resurrection** of Jesus, there is no New Testament, no church, and not much hope!

As Christians, we are **Easter people, and resurrection is the core** of our faith!

And today's story is about resurrection.

This story is found **only in the Gospel of Luke**.

It takes place on **Easter—the day of Jesus' resurrection**.

Two of Jesus followers,

Cleopas and a friend, are walking the long road to Emmaus, having heard an unbelievable story about the empty tomb.

They are down, and dejected, wondering what to do, now that Jesus is dead, and they don't even know where to find his body!

And that's the **moment when Jesus appears**, walking right beside them on the road.

I wonder, has this **ever happened to YOU?**

Have you ever wondered—**where are you God?**

And suddenly you see a **sign?** Or hear a **word of hope?**

But here, they don't recognize Jesus at all.

We don't know why—Luke just says that **eyes were kept from recognizing him**.

So, what is keeping their eyes closed?

Possibly their **grief**.

And **unmet expectations**.

They **had expected** Jesus to be a leader who would rescue them from the Romans.

They expected Jesus to be a powerful ruler, not die on a cross!

And they never expected his empty tomb!

They can't believe the women's report
about an angel announcing Jesus' resurrection.

I wonder—how often are *OUR eyes closed*, like theirs?

And have *WE ever expected Jesus to be a certain kind of Savior?*

Like one who would take away all our *troubles?*

Or support our *political* position?

Or give us *health, wealth, or freedom* from suffering?

Don't we often expect God to be a certain way, to do certain things for us?

We even bargain with God!

Haven't we all had expectations about God?

And Luke seems to be saying that *their eyes were closed because of it.*

But I also wonder if they *weren't totally paying attention* to him?

Maybe because of their *grief?*

Maybe because they were so *preoccupied* with everything that had seen during Holy Week in Jerusalem?

I mean they were surely *traumatized* by Jesus' unjust arrest and crucifixion!

And because their eyes were closed,

They just see him as a man walking along the same road.

And to make matters worse,

he doesn't seem to understand what they are talking about!

Jesus asks: "*What are you discussing with each other?*"

They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸ *Then Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"*

Jesus asks: "What things?"

They go on to describe what happened to their friend and Lord,
and then they reveal their true feelings, and deep disappointment:

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

We had hoped.

Their hopes in Jesus were shattered by what they witnessed.

And that's when the *story begins to turn.*

Jesus says 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^[i] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”*

Jesus then begins to *explain the scriptures* to them,
He *interprets the things about himself* in the scriptures.

As they approach Emmaus, Jesus acts as if he is going on,
And they invite him in: “*Stay with us, because it is almost evening*”
So he went in to stay with them.

And then a *miracle*, right in front of them.

³⁰ *When he was at the table, 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.*

They are *so excited*, they leave right away to return to Jerusalem,
to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection!

This story gets me wondering---

when are *OUR EYES closed* to Jesus walking beside us?

What *keeps us from seeing* Jesus in our own lives?

Has *grief or sorrow* ever closed your eyes?

Have you ever focused so much on what is lost, or what is wrong, that your eyes—
Or your senses—were closed, and you couldn’t see God in your life?

It reminds me of the *famous poem* by Mary Stevenson.

She writes:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

*In each scene I noticed **footprints in the sand.***

*Sometimes there were **two sets of footprints,***
*other times there were **one set of footprints.***

This bothered me because I noticed that
*during the **low periods** of my life, when I was*
suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat,
*I could see **only one set** of footprints.*

So I said to the Lord, “You promised me Lord, that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.

*But I have noticed that during the **most trying periods***

*of my life there have only been **ONE** set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?"*
 The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only **ONE** set of footprints, is when I **CARRIED** you."

Isn't that so true?

We may ***FEEL like we are alone, but Jesus is actually always with us.***
 The question is—how can we ***open our eyes*** and lives to his presence?

What if ***being overwhelmed*** can close our eyes, our senses, our hearts.
 These two disciples were surely overwhelmed
 with ***all that they had seen*** in the last week of Jesus' life, especially the cross.

Which makes me think about us, today.

Aren't we ***often overwhelmed with images, and information?***

So much—that we can barely take in what is actually in front of us?

It's no secret that the ***attention span*** of the average person in 2023
 is very, very short.

We are so used to seeing social media ads, and stories, and videos.

We are so used to seeing things that are ***virtual***—

that we often miss things that are ***REAL, and in real time.***

This is understandable.

Real life, like walking outside—is ***nothing like online videos***,
 YouTube or Tik-Tok.

It's so much ***slower***.

It takes ***time to let it all soak in.***

It means ***WE have to slow down***, and let it soak in!

I was reading a great article this week by Tish Harrison Warren, an Episcopalian
 priest who writes for the Times.

Her article is, "***How to Pray with our Eyes Open***".

The title comes from an article by Presbyterian pastor,

and translator of *The Message Bible*, the late Rev. ***Eugene Peterson.***

Peterson had a gift for seeing things. For noticing things.

It made him a great pastor and Bible translator.

And Peterson had an appreciation for ***other people who notice things.***

Like American poet, ***Annie Dillard.***

Dillard has written award winning books, like *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, where she studied God's creation with a microscope.

She describes every single thing outdoors with the *words of an artist*.

So, Peterson says that she knows how to '*pray with her eyes open*'.

Tish Harrison Warren, *How to Pray With our Eyes Open*, nytimes.com, April 16, 2023.

Isn't that a *compelling image*?

We think of prayer as something with our eyes closed,
and heads bowed—

but what if prayer can also be *NOTICING things* around us?

What if *prayer can be PAYING ATTENTION---*

especially to the *gifts of God* in creation?

Like wind and earth, beautiful flowers and striking sunrises.

Like bugs and birds, rabbits and squirrels.

You know, *it is Earth Sunday*—and part of our calling as Christians is to care for the Earth...and to care for it, we need to notice it!

And, what if prayer can be paying attention to *Jesus—in our midst*.

In a form that we might not expect.

Warren writes that she feels a *sense of responsibility as a Christian*,
to *slow down and pay attention*.

She says: *In the frenetic and disintegrated world of screens, smartphones, notifications and noise, the material world beckons—the world of skin, dew, mourning doves and evening primroses.*

It quietly asks us to see, to notice, to attend to its wisdom and beauty.

Then she quotes Dillard, who wrote: *We are here to abet creation and to witness to it, to notice each thing so each thing gets noticed. Together we notice not only mountain shadow and each stone on the beach, but we notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature so that creation need not play to an empty house.* Quoted from LIFE magazine, 1988, in Tish Harrison Warren, *How to Pray With our Eyes Open*, nytimes.com, April 16, 2023.

I love that.

I think that we *often fail to notice the world, and the people, around us*.

Have YOU ever *failed to notice beauty*—right under your nose?

Or what about *failing to notice a person* in need?

Or someone who wants to share a moment of connection with you?

We get in *such a hurry*,
 We don't look each other in the eyes,
 We rarely say hello, or 'how are you?'
 And if we do, we don't take time to hear a response.

Warren says that *noticing everything* around us,
Paying attention, is part of being Christian—
 because we believe in a *material resurrection*.
 We believe that Jesus was resurrected—in **bodily form**.
 He was transformed, but he was touchable, palpable.
 He could eat and drink, as we see in this beautiful Emmaus story.

In fact, Jesus will go on to appear in an upper room
 and have Thomas touch the scars in his hands and side.
 He will cook fish and eat with his disciples on the beach.
 He will speak to a crowd of followers—as a person, not a ghost, not an apparition.

This is one reason we Christians believe in a *material heaven*.
 Not just a place in the sky where souls float around.
 But an actual *new heaven and new earth, as Revelation 21* so beautifully
 describes, where people are real, creation is real,
 and everything is beautiful, peaceful, joyful and full of life.

Warren says this new heaven and earth is a place with *real people*,
 and '*bays and banjos, artichokes and art, dandelions and dancing*'.
 Tish Harrison Warren, *How to Pray With our Eyes Open*, nytimes.com, April 16, 2023.

So how can we *open our eyes, and our senses, to Jesus*—in our midst?
 How can we be *wide-eyed*, even when we are grieving, or struggling?
 How can we *look for Jesus*—even when our expectations are unmet?

Friends, let's *pay more ATTENTION*—
 to *everything, and everyone* around us!
 Let's **pray with eyes, ears, minds, and hearts—open!**
 That is the Good News of the Gospel today!
 May we all *open our lives to the presence of Jesus* beside us,
 And find the joy of knowing, and seeing Him in this journey called life, with us.
 And for the gift of His presence, all God's people can say together, Amen.

