

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

Sermon

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Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

1225 Piper Boulevard, Naples, FL 34110

Was All This Really Necessary?

Luke 24:13-35

Everybody talks about current events. If it's in the news, it's on our tongues. From the hairdresser to the coffee shop, from the halls of congress to people's living rooms, everybody talks about current events. Nowadays there's lots of talk about the presidential primaries. The talk show hosts simply can't get enough. Recent conversations have focused on a certain pastor in Chicago. Makes no difference to the critics that in the 36 years he was pastor of the Trinity Church "the congregation grew to 8000 members," and "reached out to the community with mission programs, education, social services, AIDS education and treatment, and health care."¹ All that matters to the critics is an outrageous 30-second sound bite. Imagine your whole life's work, everything good you ever accomplished, summed up in a videotape of the most outrageous moment in your life! And yet, everybody's talking about it. It's in the news.

No wonder then that those two people from Emmaus were talking about what had happened in Jerusalem. We can almost hear them. Can you believe it? Why would anyone want to kill Jesus? The things he did! Healing people. Caring for strangers. Feeding 5000 hungry men, not to mention women and children. Most people would hail him as a hero. Yes, he made a few outrageous statements. "I have not come to bring peace but a sword." And, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?" Agreed he did say some pretty outrageous things. Still, that was no reason to crucify him. Like today, people in those days talked about current events. Tried to make sense of it all.

They were so engrossed in their conversation that they didn't even notice the man walking with them. Until he spoke, they didn't even know he was there. So Jesus joined the conversation. Began to talk with them about the crucifixion. Began where they were, with their interest and their concerns. Does he also join our conversations? I know we're not used to thinking that way. But just for a moment, consider the possibility. Maybe Jesus also talks current events with us. Maybe Christ is present in people we talk to in the coffee shop or in the hairdressers. Maybe Christ is present in the halls of congress and people's living rooms. If they didn't recognize him, how would we? They'd seen his face, listened to his voice, traveled with him. Yet they didn't know him. Who did they think he was? A pilgrim who visited Jerusalem? There were plenty of them. We don't know what they thought, really. All we know is, they didn't recognize Jesus when he joined their conversation. Maybe that's the way it is with us.

Whatever he said, fired their imagination. Whatever he told them, fascinated them, no end. Thinking back later, they asked: "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he interpreted the scriptures?" Yet during the conversation they didn't catch on. Don't you know the scriptures? He asked. Then he led them through them, story after story, event after event, person after person, prophecy after prophecy. Beginning with Moses, the story goes, he interpreted to them the scriptures. Story after story, event after event, person after person, prophecy after prophecy carry

¹John Buchanan, On Jeremiah Wright: A statement made during morning worship at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago on Sunday, March 30, 2008.

the theme of death and resurrection. Consider the Exodus, how the Israelites were dead to the future, caught in the grip of powerful oppression. But God heard their cry, and delivered them. Which stories did Jesus use to make his points? We have no idea. But looking back, reading the Old Testament through the eyes of Resurrection faith, we find resurrection all over the place.

As Christians we can't understand the Scriptures apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus. On the other hand, we can't understand the death and resurrection of Jesus apart from the Scriptures. Every one of us knows that. Every one of us has studied a passage of scripture, scratched our heads, and wondered what it meant. Then, someone came along with different understanding, and the whole passage took on new meaning and life for us. Remember the moment of discovery, your own dawning of understanding, the excitement of a new vision. Didn't your hearts burn within you? It's paradoxical. Nevertheless, at one and the same time the scriptures point to Jesus, and Jesus points us to the scriptures.

Notice, though, how you can't ever go back. Once your eyes have been opened, once you've understood the scriptures through Christ, you can't go back to old understandings. Once people thought the scriptures permitted slavery. Hardly anybody would argue that now. People used to think the Bible called for a male dominated world. Nowadays, most of us hear it calling for new relationships between men and women. Can you even believe that we used to think otherwise? When your mind has been opened to a new understanding, you can't go back to the old ways. Once Christ has been revealed to you, you can't see the world the same way again.

Was all this necessary? Yes! Why? I really don't know. Because of it we've been changed, you and I. Might we have changed apart from Christ's death and resurrection? I doubt it! Sitting at table with friends when one of them breaks bread, and suddenly it's as if we were face to face with Jesus. Singing a favorite hymn in worship, and suddenly, just for a moment we feel like a child again, singing that song in church long ago. When was it that he started walking down this road with us? When did we realize that he was the one speaking to us? Somewhere along the road, we heard a voice. Somewhere along the way we sat at table. Somewhere, somehow he appeared to us and we were amazed.

Yet when we looked again, he was gone. Was it at the hairdressers or the coffee shop? Did the change in us come from halls of congress or in someone's living room? Don't know for sure. All we really know is that somewhere along the way we began seeing the world differently, experiencing life differently. Somehow we've begun to realize we have seen the Lord. We have! All because Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. Christ is risen indeed!