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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“WALKING TO EMMAUS”**

**Luke 24:13-35**

*When does the Lord reveal himself most powerfully to his people, cutting through our fog of ignorance and busyness and self-centeredness?*

Is it when we are at our strong, hard-working, rule-keeping, got-it-together, self-sufficient, “See-all-the-good-things-I-have-achieved-for-God,” shiny best?

Or is it when we are at our wounded, uncertain, stumbling, nearly falling apart, inglorious, un-self-sufficient, “Why-in-the-world-did-God-ever-choose-me” worst?

→ Of course, it is not an either/or matter. God does as He wills, when He wills, in the ways He wills, without consulting me (praise God!).

→ All the same, God’s Word and human experience testify to God’s apparent preference for revealing himself to those who are, {1 Co 1:26-28} **“by human standards,” “not ...wise; not...influential; not...of noble birth.”** God chooses **“the foolish things...the weak things...the lowly things... and the despised things”** despite our obsessive striving to impress him.

📖 Christ’s theophany (that is, *visible divine self-revelation*) to two of his followers in Luke 24:13-35 is an excellent example. Cleopas and his companion (who might have been his wife, Mary, whom we meet in John 19) are not at their best here:

✔ {24:21} They have fearfully fled Jerusalem and are on their way {24:13} **“to a village called Emmaus,”** probably

to avoid being identified as supporters of a dangerous insurrectionist.

✔ Their faces are **“downcast”** (verse 17).

✔ They feel like helpless victims. Notice the passive quality of their speech in verse 20: **“The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him”** – as though Jesus had no say in what happened to him!

✔ Their profoundest hopes have been dashed to pieces and ground to dust. Did you catch their use of the past tense in verse 21? **“We had hoped he was the one.”**

✔ And they are at their wits’ end about Jesus’ corpse. Verses 22-24: **“Some of our women amazed us”** (the word translated **“amazed”** can also have the sense of *causing one to go out of one’s mind*). **“They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They... told us... they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”**

Was it a mere seven days ago that Jesus entered Jerusalem as its righteous king? He was going to destroy the Romans, expunge all wickedness from within Israel, and restore to his people the power, wealth, beauty, honor, peace and religious vitality of the Davidic kingdom.

Cleopas and his companion would have a special place there – a place they have earned: they had gotten in on the ground floor and devoted

themselves to the cause. They were strong and courageous and oh-so-confident.

But that was last week. If there is one word that describes this pair now it is *defeated*. Such a far cry from the glory days, so recent, yet so long ago!

Yet it is today, when Cleopas and his companion are at their foolish, faithless worst, consumed by fear and self-pity, ready to chuck it all, that Jesus reveals himself most powerfully to them!

Isn't this Good News?! Though this theophany was a unique event, Messiah still comes to us in spiritual ways, even when we deserve it the least.

This is not to say that the Lord does not reach out when we are at our best. He does! The point is that Jesus neither needs nor requires us to get it together before he draws near. His self-revelation does not depend on our worthiness.

Having said this, our experience of Christ's self-revelation seems to be most powerful when we are acutely aware of our defects. And so the apostle Paul writes: **“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”** (1 Co 12:9-10).

That is certainly true for Cleopas and his friend. When their eyes are opened to Jesus' presence their confusion turns to clarity, their grief to joy, and their despair to a new and deeper hope!

Does it follow that we should encourage the Lord to approach us by inviting spiritual struggle or stoking our inadequacies?

By no means! That would be as arrogant and self-centered as pretending to be self-sufficient.

What is constructive is to prepare ourselves for Christ's self-revelation. Based on this account in Luke 24, we can cultivate personal readiness through:

⚙ Holistic prayer. This includes praise for who God is, thanksgiving for what God has done, confession of sin, lament, supplication (that is, requests for needs to be met), *and* submission to God's lordship.

We are more familiar (hence, more comfortable) with some elements than others. Lament, in particular, can feel awkward and even disrespectful or unspiritual.

But look at verses 16-24. Jesus joins these disciples, takes charge of the conversation, and gets them to vent their pain, grief, frustration and disappointment to him. In fact, he pushes them to voice their lament.

Remember, biblical lament {CBW} **“affirms faith, while acknowledging”** circumstances and experiences that are **“painful and disappointing.”** A true lament is not an indulgence in disbelief; it is {MHR} **“a cry of pain that initiates the search to ask God, What are you doing?”** As such, {CBW} **“A lament is an act of trust that God accepts us as we really are and receives our expressions of emotion.”**

Cleopas and his companion are speaking with (and then listening to) God's Son on the deepest level. Without realizing it, they are praying. Are we?

☼ Scripture reading and study.

What does the Jesus do in verses 25-27? He draws the connections between God's written Word and recent events.

I suspect that digging deeply into Scripture is not usually our first or second choice when we feel inadequate – much less when we feel good about what we are doing for God. It would be great if it were.

→ In Romans 15:4, Paul explains that one reason the Old Testament **“was written”** was **“so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope”** – hope, not in ourselves and our capabilities, but in the Messiah and his overwhelming sufficiency.

→ Likewise, the New Testament is given for many purposes, one of them being {2 Tim 3:17, NRSV} **“so that everyone who belongs to God may proficient, equipped for every good work”** – and responding rightly to the Lord's self-revelation is one of those good works.

You and I can prepare for Christ's self-revelation by reading and studying Scripture. Are we?

☼ We can also cultivate personal readiness through Christian fellowship.

In verses 28-31 this pair of disciples urges Jesus to stay. He says grace, breaks the bread, and gives it to them. Their eyes are opened, and they recognize him!

This is not the sacrament of communion. In form and content, it is an ordinary meal. And yet the Lord reveals himself to them while in fellowship at the table.

This is no accident. In the first century, sharing a meal was not a casual matter. It was a sign of welcome, a commitment to friendship, and an act of honor.

Cultural traditions change, but the basic principle remains the same. Doesn't God's Holy Spirit move more powerfully among the gathered body than in the individual? Doesn't the Lord of the Church minister to us through our brothers and sisters?

Cleopas and his companion were better equipped to respond well to Christ's self-revelation because they were meeting him together. Are we?

☼ Luke 24 points to one more readiness factor: transformation of the mind.

What do the disciples say in verses 19-20? **“Jesus was a prophet, powerful in word and deed. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced... and they crucified him.”** Then, in **verse 21: “but we had hoped that he was the one who is going to redeem Israel”** – the unspoken assumption being that death on a cross is incompatible with God's kingdom.

They say this even though Jesus had plainly foretold his suffering, death and resurrection. What is more, he repeatedly taught that self-denial and cross-carrying are the essence of discipleship.

But they were enslaved by worldly thinking. And to the world, the cross makes no sense.

In verses 25-27 Christ enlightens them to the necessity of humble service and redemptive suffering. Their hearts burn, and they are {Ro 12:2} **“transformed by the renewing of”** their minds.

You and I have every opportunity to renew our minds. Are we?

Cleopas and the other disciple were at their wounded, uncertain, stumbling, nearly falling apart, inglorious, un-self-sufficient worst when Christ Jesus revealed himself!

Verses 22-25 describe their response: **“They got up,”** dog-tired though they had been, **“and returned at once to Jerusalem,”** the city of danger. **“There they found”** the other disciples and **“told what had happened on the way,”** doubtless with great joy.

That is what happens to the people of God when they walk to Emmaus with Jesus.