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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“CLEOPAS, RAISED WITH CHRIST”

Luke 24:13-35

✍ A seemingly trivial decision or minor change in conditions can forever transform a life, or the world.

☑ It was spring of 1992, and I could hardly wait to start my year of pastoral internship. Soon I would be heading east, to a Covenant church in the suburbs of New York City. Then, at the last minute, I was told that plans had changed: I had been reassigned to Mason City, IA. In my disappointment I reminded myself that God knew what he was doing. Besides, how much difference could the location of the church make? A great deal, as it turns out.

Mason City is where I met Beth. God has used (and continues to use) our marriage to shape and refine us in profound ways. Had I gone to Long Island we would never have met and wed.

It follows that our daughters would not have been born. Their value far exceeds their place in our family: I do not think it is boasting to say that the world would be poorer without them and their potential descendants.

Then there is my vocation. My first church would not have hired a single man, and another woman might not have agreed to move to Essex and remain there for seven difficult years. The impact on my ministry would have been substantial.

Naturally, all those relationships, opportunities and events have generated countless moments of decision.

Some have significantly altered the trajectory of my life. I cannot imagine what would have happened and who I would be, had I gone to NY for internship!

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☐ The drama of Luke 24:13-35 is a case in point.

☞ Let us start by setting the scene. It is Sunday afternoon. The place is the dusty road that connects Jerusalem with Emmaus.

👤 As for the characters, we see two. One is Cleopas {Lk 24:18}. The other is not named; but if Cleopas is the man John calls Clopas {Jn 19:25}, his companion is probably his wife, Mary.

They are Christ Followers. Or, to be more precise, they see themselves as former disciples of Jesus, whom they {Lk 24:21} “**had hoped**” was the Messiah, come “**to redeem Israel.**”

But not anymore: not since he was crucified and buried. Who continues to follow a dead man?

This pair is the picture of brokenness. They are beaten down and beset by doubt. You can see it in their faces and posture. You can hear it in their voices.

☆ The action begins when a third character enters. This man overtakes them and initiates a conversation {Lk 24:15-17}. “**What are you discussing?**” he asks.

They come to a stop and just stand there, “**their faces downcast**” {Lk 24:17}. Can’t you visualize it? Their shoulders are slumped. They are frowning. Their gaze is fixed on the dirt.

They are astonished at his lack of knowledge: “**Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not**

know the things that have happened there in these days?” (Or, as another translation {NRSV} puts it, **“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”** {Lk 24:18})

The stranger asks: **“What things?”** {Lk 24:19}. They launch into a bleak recitation of recent events, told from the loser’s point-of-view.

☹ Notice that they portray Jesus as a passive victim to whom these things just happened (**“The... priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him”** {Lk 24:20}) rather than as the victor who firmly stated, **“I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”** {Jn 10:17-18}

☹ Notice, also, that they speak of him in the past tense: **“Jesus... was a prophet we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel”** {Lk 24:19}. They do not see as clearly as they assume.

👍 Yet, it is to their credit that they speak instead of keeping quiet. After all, it is risky to be associated with a man who has just been executed as public enemy number one. Say the wrong words to the wrong person and *you* might be arrested, tortured, or killed as an enemy of the state.

Or maybe they aren’t so bold. The couple might just think that talking is a trivial decision or a minor change in conditions. If so, they are mistaken!

The stranger seizes the moment, declaring: **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have**

to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” {Lk 24:25-26} Then he opens the Scriptures to them, correcting their misunderstandings about the Messiah and the kingdom of God. {Lk 24:27}

👍 At Emmaus they reach another fork in the road when the stranger **“[acts] as if he [is] going farther.”** They could let him go; instead, they strongly urge him to stay. For that reason he comes inside. {Lk 24:28-29}

✂ This is *the* great turning-point: **“When he [is] at the table with them, he [takes] bread, [gives] thanks, [breaks] it and [begins] to give it to them. Then their eyes [are] opened and they [recognize] him, and he [disappears] from sight”** {Lk 24:30}!

They **“have been raised with Christ”** {Col 3:1}! Their minds are enlightened, their faith renewed, their hope restored, their love rekindled. **“Were not our hearts burning... while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”** they say. Even their bodies are refreshed: **“They [get] up and [return] at once to Jerusalem ... [find] the”** other disciples and tell them **“what... happened... and how”** they recognized Jesus **“when he broke the bread”** {Lk 24.32-35}.

A seemingly trivial decision or minor change in conditions – even the resolve to invite a stranger to stay for a meal – can forever transform a life, or the world.

Where is the Gospel in the road to Emmaus account?

☐ We can determine part of the answer by reading it alongside an unexpected text. The differences are

obvious, but the parallels are uncanny. These passages are like mirror images, with the same kind of movement only in opposite directions. Please turn to Genesis 3.

☛ Each narrative features two humans: in Genesis 3 there is Adam the first man and Eve the first woman; in Luke 24 it is another man, Cleopas, and his companion (probably his wife Mary).

In some ways, their situations could hardly be more different. Eden is still unspoiled by corruption, decay and death; first century Palestine is seriously blighted. In Eden work is mission; in first century Palestine it is labor. Adam and Eve have only one prohibition, they are perfectly free within and without; the couple in Luke are bound by their brokenness and subject to the Romans.

☞ Even so they all share one crucial condition: a kind of blindness. Adam and Eve are blind to the knowledge of evil {Ge 3:5} and do not recognize the serpent's identity and lethal purpose. Cleopas and his partner are blind to the knowledge of the Messiah's good nature, mission and resurrection and do not recognize his identity and life-giving purpose (Lk 24:16).

☛ Each narrative involves a third, supernatural being who enters at a critical moment. In Genesis it is the serpent, a manifestation of unholy Satan. He comes “**only to steal, kill and destroy**” {Jn 10:10}, and on the Day of the Lord he will be thrown into the lake of fire. In **Luke** it is **Holy Jesus** who has come that we might have life. He died **but was raised**” and “**cannot die again**” {Ro 6:9}, and on the Day of the Lord he will usher in his kingdom in all of its fullness.

☛ Each narrative revolves around conversation and an act of eating.

In Genesis, Eve and Adam let the serpent engage her in dialogue. The Enemy questions, misquotes, and denies God's Word. They could, at any time, expel the serpent from Eden, cry out to the LORD for help, or turn and walk away – but they do not. That series of small decisions leads to a big one: will they intentionally eat, or not eat, the forbidden fruit?

In Luke, Cleopas and companion allow the stranger to engage them in dialogue. This Friend questions them, quotes God's Word, and opens it up for them. They could, at any time, argue against him, shut down the conversation with silence, or walk away – but they do not. That series of small decisions leads to a big one: will they break bread with this man, or not?

☛ And each narrative involves the eternal destiny of humankind.

In Genesis, they couple's eyes are opened. They gain knowledge of evil – devastating, practical knowledge. But their knowledge of goodness starts to fade. Their spousal relationship of mutual innocence and perfect beauty is tainted by shame. They have exchanged openness and intimacy with the LORD God for fear and hostility. They have traded life for death, not only for themselves but also for all their descendants.

In Luke, the couple's eyes are opened. They gain knowledge of good – wholesome, practical knowledge. They see who Jesus is, what he has

accomplished, and the nature of his kingdom. They exchange fear for boldness, despair for hope, and self-centeredness for love. Instead of protecting themselves by escaping the danger of the city, they dedicate themselves to God's service by going back to Jerusalem and testifying to Christ's resurrection!

This is the thing. As history the events of Genesis 3 and Luke 24 are unique, never to be repeated. And yet we are each of us, in a way, Adam or Eve: the serpent keeps coming to us every day, tempting us to eat the fruit. And we are, each of us, Cleopas or his companion: the risen Christ comes to us every day, eager to break bread with all who desire his presence. Those decisions about conversation and eating often appear to be trivial, but they can forever transform a life, or the world.

Let us live as those who are on the road to Emmaus. May our hearts burn within us in fellowship with the LORD! May our eyes be opened to him and his goodness!