

The Message for May 8, 2011
Luke 24:13-35
Future Church... Our Direction
The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

Check out this video from the story book “Alice In Wonderland.” It’s a conversation between Alice and The Cheshire Cat about direction and people and life...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUnqbBgYZml>

How often do you find yourself, like Alice on the road of life, not sure which way to go? We face those kind of choices everyday. And in the big picture -- if we aren’t sure *where* we are going, as the Cheshire Cat says, “*any direction will take us there.*”

On the road of life we have two choices -- we can take the road that leads to a deeper faith in Christ Jesus guided by his cross and resurrection or we take some other road. Which road are you on?

In our reading today from Luke’s gospel we find a similar situation (*Read the Text Luke 24:13-35*).

Two of Jesus’ disciples are on the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem. It’s Easter Sunday. Jesus had risen earlier in the day and appeared to some of the women. These two guys are down the road a couple miles from Jerusalem, well into their conversation about what had happened the previous three days. A third man joins them and asks what they’re talking about. At that point, he’s a stranger to them. It’s Jesus, of course, but they don’t recognize him, lost in the details of their conversation.

Ironically, the Greek words used to describe their conversation could be translated as “arguing” or “debating.” There is confusion. There is uncertainty. There is lack of agreement between the two of them. Welcome to the church, huh? They are trying to make sense of these things. Welcome to a life of faith, huh? We often try to make sense out of the things that happen to us on the road of life too – don’t we?

In verse 17 we are told they were *sad*. “Heartbroken” – would be a good translation because in their minds Jesus had failed them. They saw him as the one -- the answer to all the world’s problems... Verse 21 reads, “We had hoped that he was the one.” I picture them just shuffling down this road of heartbreak... with no hope, no direction, no purpose.

Have we not all found ourselves on this road of heartbreak from time to time too? Why did this happen or that happen? Why did this relation go that way? Why did this person have to die this way? Why, why, why?

It’s natural to get together with our friends and talk and complain and wrestle with the past as we go off in some direction aimlessly, just as these two disciples were doing.

Notice when Jesus asks them what they are talking about, they tell him everything. How their friend, Jesus, had been handed over, condemned to death by the chief priests, and crucified. Earlier that very morning some of the women said the tomb was empty. There was talk of angels appearing, saying that Jesus is alive – “Yeah right!” I can almost hear them saying. This isn’t news to Jesus. I mean, think about it. He is probably having more than a little fun with this. “Do tell!” “You don’t say!” “No kidding!”

As they continue walking and talking, Jesus, still incognito, lays out the whole powerful story of God’s dream from the beginning of time leading up to the cross and resurrection. He leads them in a Bible study of Moses and the prophets and how the past week was all part of God’s dream to save the world.

And what a dream it is -- a dream of people coming together to experience God’s grace in their lives. A dream for people to know who they are and whose they are with a purpose for living. A dream for people to experience God’s blessings in their lives and sharing those blessings with others. A dream for people to be the living presence of Jesus in the world. A dream that people would be motivated by the Holy Spirit to do whatever it takes to make this world a better place.

Jesus speaks to their lack of hope, to their lack of direction, to their lack of purpose.... He helps them make sense out of their heartbreaking experiences and see God in the middle of it all – that God’s dream is unfolding before their very eyes... even though they can’t see it.

When they get to Emmaus, they sit together around a table and share a meal. They still don’t recognize Jesus. It’s amazing what we have trouble seeing the further away from the cross and empty tomb we tend to be.

But in one transforming moment, as bread is broken -- as a meal is shared -- Jesus is revealed to them. It is Jesus! It is their Lord! Oddly enough as soon as they recognize Jesus in their midst, he’s gone. I wonder why? I believe it’s because Jesus has a plan and a direction for his disciples...

They are so awestruck, so moved by this experience, no longer filled with broken hearts but with burning hearts. Burning hearts that motivate them to jump up from the table and make their way back to Jerusalem that very night! They have a burning desire to tell others about their God experience. And that’s exactly what they do.

Now this was not a rational thing to do. They could have been arrested at any time and end up on the cross like Jesus. That’s probably why they left Jerusalem in the first place Not only that but it wasn’t safe to travel at night, that’s why they invited Jesus to stay with them. At night you have a really good chance of being mugged, or beaten, or robbed, or killed anywhere along the road. They were willing to take that risk.

It would be like being walking back here to Myerstown from the Lebanon Valley Mall in the middle of the road at night with cars zooming past you in both directions. You'd be crazy to do it. And crazy they were to share their experience. Why not wait until morning when it's safe because this news couldn't wait. They ran, skipped, hopped and laughed with excitement all the way with hearts burning to share.

An encounter with the living Jesus changes the direction of our lives because the journey of faith is guided by the cross and resurrection of Jesus. I hope and pray you encounter Jesus here today during this time of worship. I hope and pray he turns your heartbreak into heartburn equipping you to participate in God's dream for the world.

Sometimes it's hard to see what God is doing while we are in the middle of a painful experience, when we are on the road of heartbreak. It's easy to forget or fail to see how powerful Jesus' promises are.

- When he says he will never leave us or forsake us that applies even on the road of heartbreak.
- When he says that he will supply all our needs in tough times too – that's hard to believe.
- When he says all things are working for the good for those who love him – that's hard to see.

It calls for faith. It calls of doing the unthinkable sometimes. It calls for seeing Jesus in the strangers that come into our lives.

Last Sunday, Simon, my son and I spent the afternoon cleaning up our '65 Mustang to go to the Car Cruise at the Dairy Queen in Palmyra. We love cruising over to the DQ to check out all the cars and eat ice cream and cruise back home. This was going to be our first cruise of the year but it was also going to be our last cruise to DQ because they were not going to host it any more.

As we are heading down the road it started to rain. The Mustang doesn't like rain. I said to Simon that we should probably turn around and go back home because there probably wouldn't be very many cars at the show. I saw the sadness on his face. I decided we would stop at the Auto Zone to get an exhaust hanger for the Mustang and go home and fix it. When we pulled into the Auto Zone two guys came over and wanted to see our Mustang. I popped open the hood and the door.

When I turned around there was a stranger standing behind me. We talked about the Mustang and I said we were heading over to the DQ in Palmyra for a cruise night but that it wasn't a good night for it. He agreed. He then started telling me about his '84 Mustang that can do wheelies, with the front tires coming off the ground about this high (He put his hand just above Simon's head). Simon said, "I would like to see that." "So would I," I added. This stranger said he races at the drag strip at Maple Grove. I said we've never been there. He said, "You have to go sometime." Then he said, "Wait here." He came back and handed me these (hold up the tickets) two tickets to the Maple

Grove Race Way for this weekend. WOW! Who was I that this stranger would give these to me?

Yesterday, Simon and I spent the day at the Maple Grove Drag Stripe. And what a car show it was. As we were walking around I thought about getting Simon a T-Shirt. But I didn't see any for sale. Then we saw a driver working to repack the parachute on back of his car. His wife called Simon over and showed him the inside of the car and the release button for the parachute. She practically put him in the car. He loved it. Then the driver came over and handed Simon a T-shirt. He said, "This is the last one I have." WOW! God is good. All the time. And all the time. God is good.

Jesus is our hope. Jesus is our purpose. Jesus is our direction. He will not leave us or forsake us. He will not leave us high and dry with breaking hearts. Instead he joins us in the journey of life to help us make sense of the good, the bad, and the ugly that life throws at us. The next stranger you meet might just be Christ Jesus himself pouring out God's grace into your life.

On the road of life we really have two choices -- we can take the road that leads to a deeper faith in Christ Jesus or we can take some other road. Which road are you on? May the cross and empty tomb be your guide. Amen.