

He Walks and Talks with Me!

Shepherd's Grace Church

May 4, 2014

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?" ¹⁹He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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." ²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

³⁶While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them,

“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24: 13-41) (Also Read 1Peter 1: 17-23)

Last week, Rochelle and I took the week off and wandered out to Las Vegas. We do want to thank you all for the time off. I know it puts an extra pressure on each and every one of you to come and participate more in worship when we are not here and I want you to know how much we appreciate it. I especially want to thank Robert for helping a little more than he usually does and of course, Josie and Maggie for their outstanding help with music! What a blessing to look at the generations represented in worship last week and recognize just how healthy our congregation is. We have a wonderful mix of older and younger who willingly offer their gifts to God! There is no clearer example of that than the leadership by our elders in cleaning and organizing the church after worship! Albert, Phil, Tamara, Wanda, Linda and Chris are great examples of what it means to be elder...I mean...to be Elders! A sincere thanks to each of you for the incredible work you do to make our church a more enjoyable place to worship!

But now, back to my story about Las Vegas. Late on Sunday night, after spending most of the day at Hoover Dam, we wandered down to Freemont Street which, for those who are not familiar with Las Vegas is the older part of downtown. Freemont street is the home of the original Las Vegas casinos where the city first developed its reputation. With the advent of the new strip of casinos and hotels south of Freemont Street, the older part of the city needed to re-invent itself to keep up. The younger people were not coming downtown and there was a real danger of these historic landmarks going out of business.

Freemont Street found a way to overcome the glitz and glitter of the strip by creating the world’s largest light screen. The screen is four blocks long east to west and intersects another light screen four blocks

long north to south. These light screens continually display changing visuals overhead to add depth and dimension to the outdoor entertainment venue. Sometimes people are made to feel they are in an aquarium; other times they are made to feel as if they are in outer space. Whether under the sea or over the rainbow, people are continually bombarded by visual images allowing them to experience themselves in a unique way!

Additionally, every hour music synchronizes with the light screen to invite everyone gathered to stop and come together for a few minutes and connect with the images on the screen as a community. To be sure this is an unusual community. It could probably only exist in Las Vegas where people's inhibitions are lowered and where they are looking for and expecting different events to drive their lives, even if only for a time!

As you wander through this experience every sense is assaulted. You smell the unusual foods, the candies and the breads. You touch the textured art of the street vendors. You taste the ice cream you know you are enjoying way too late at night, and you see the incredible beauty of the art created by spray painters who create scenes from their own imagination using only spray cans and torn pages from the phone book! Every sense is assaulted! Even to the point of overload. You reach a point where you can't trust all you are experiencing!

We came around one corner and heard the music of Elvis Presley! We pushed closer because note after note and song after song sounded more like the deceased superstar than the note before. As we got closer we couldn't believe what we were seeing. There on the street corner, it was as if we had stepped back in time! Clad in a white jumpsuit with fringe flying with every wiggle of his hips, gold neck chains bouncing with every shrug of his shoulders appeared Elvis!

Now, I remember where I was when I heard the news that Elvis was dead! I remember the reports of drugs and pills and weight problems and I remember my frustration that someone so successful could struggle with addictions as they were reported. I do not know what happened to Elvis. I am not here this morning to talk about conspiracy theories but instead to suggest a similarity!

It has now been two weeks since Easter; the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. How have you experienced Him? Today, we meet two of his disciples. They are not two of the 12 who were his innermost circle. They are but two of many. They are walking along talking about all the things that have taken place in their lives since the crucifixion of Christ! Jesus and His life are the most important things they have to discuss as they walk along toward a destination that is just a short distance away.

Jesus was important to them. Perhaps they did not travel with him from the River Jordan after his baptism. Perhaps they were not at the seashore when Jesus walked by and called for their repentance as the Kingdom of God comes near. They met Jesus however! Somewhere! Somehow, they met Jesus and had a relationship with him! They knew him and they had hope for Him in their lives. As they walked along that evening Jesus was the most important person in their lives and they were talking about Him and discussing all these things that had taken place in their lives.

We have all walked along, driven along, flown along in the last couple of weeks. What has Jesus been to us? Has there been a point in our lives where we have made His resurrection a topic of our conversation with our friends? What difference does it make to us that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Does it change anything for us? Do we behave differently? Do we recognize that Jesus victory over death is a victory for each and every one of us? Have we considered it?

These two disciples who left Jerusalem saddened by the events which had taken place there were looking for a new reality for themselves. They were overcome with grief to the point where they had to escape their current reality. They could not tolerate the closeness of their surroundings. They could not function as they walked past the garden at Gethsemane. They could not move as they stepped out their door and saw Golgotha. They could not bring themselves to go to the tomb because they were so overcome by grief that they could only remember their sadness. They could not remember their scripture! They could not remember all that Jesus had taught them. They could only see the world as it was and they were longing for something more.

Be honest with yourself this morning. When you woke up on the Monday after Easter Sunday did you feel a change in the world? Did you realize a difference? As you were on your way to work that morning, when you were on your way to coffee that morning, to take care of the kids, to see a friend did you call any one and discuss with them the events of Easter Sunday? Did you allow yourself to experience the presence of the risen Christ?

Or were you more like our friends who walked along the road to Emmaus. These two, as they walked along did not consider possibilities other than those they could see in their own reality. They knew the events of the weekend. Jesus had been handed over by religious leaders to the Roman powers. He was crucified and was dead! The overwhelming reality of their situation was too much for them to bear so they left town unable to imagine another reality. This was the end! This was all they could see, all they could imagine, all they could comprehend! Nothing had changed! The world was still the world and it was a cold dark place where people were persecuted, prosecuted and killed!

These two ordinary people left Jerusalem feeling much the same way we felt on the Monday after Easter! They were talking with one another in an attempt to console one another and overcome the grief they were experiencing yet for them, nothing had changed! Hatred was a reality for them! Bitterness was a reality for them! Death was a reality for them! They could not imagine it otherwise! All they could see was the slowly deteriorating demise of hope! There was nothing left so they left!

Why did I tell you the story of Fremont Street this morning? Was it so you could be amazed at the advances of modern technology? Was it so you could imagine good times in exotic places that allow us to escape for a few moments from the reality of difficult and challenging lives? Was it so you could laugh with me at how ridiculous people behave when they are in places far away from those who know them? No! I shared with you the story so you could be invited into a new possibility! Fremont Street was dead! It had no hope of survival! All hope was gone!

Just as when the two disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus they could see no possibility in their lives. Jesus was dead! They could not imagine a circumstance that would bring him back even though He had told them many times in his teaching that He would suffer, die and be resurrected. They could not hear his teaching because it did not fit with their reality. Dead was dead! As they walked along, when Jesus came to them He was so dead to them they could not recognize him. He was right in front of them but their eyes were kept from seeing him!

Their eyes were not kept from seeing him because they had forgotten what he looked like! They were kept from seeing him because they could not believe He was a possibility! When He came to them and asked what they were talking about they were so overcome by sadness that they stopped! They could not move as they contemplated once again the tragedy and grief that had overcome them! They stopped and stared at Him and they reproachfully reprimanded him! "Are you the only one!" they asked. Do you not know? How could you not know!

When we are mired in the muck and misery of our own situation it is easy to assume that the rest of the world is caught up in that situation with us. When we are in the midst of grief it is difficult for us to see past that grief. We can only acknowledge our own grief, our own sorrow and we believe that nothing else in the world exists. Sometimes it takes a friend, a family member or a trusted confidant to speak an alternative to us.

On this second Sunday after Easter, will we allow Jesus to be that confidant? Will we allow Him to be raised up in our hearts and will we believe He can hear us, ask us questions and open our minds to other

possibilities? No doubt, the merchants on Fremont Street were skeptical when someone first approached them about their business. They probably said things like, "How do you know?" "You have not been here! You know nothing about my business!" No doubt, one of my favorite phrases was uttered in that initial time of planning. "WE'VE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY!" I am sure it took several months and perhaps years to overcome what they had always done on Fremont Street and allow for other possibilities!

Jesus begins this process with us this morning. He asks the disciples about their business. "What things," he asks? As the disciples begin to tell Him about all that has gone wrong from their perspective, Jesus listens. Others handed Him over. Others crucified Him! Others buried Him! Others lost his body! We hoped but our hopes were dashed by the work of others! It was always someone else who was responsible for Jesus' demise. Someone else was to blame for their reality! On Fremont Street, it was the "Strip" that was taking their business. It was the new location. It was the new glitz and glitter. It was everything except that which they had control over.

Jesus brings their responsibility clearly to focus this morning. "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?" Jesus asks. How slow are you to believe that which has been revealed to you in the scripture, that which you know! Jesus chastises them, reminds them of what has been taught to them of what they should know and places the responsibility for their situation squarely on their shoulders. He unpacks the scripture for them beginning from the beginning and reveals all they should have remembered!

Once the people of Fremont Street accepted responsibility, once they recognized there could be alternative realities where death was not the only possibility, they began to move and react and respond in ways that promoted life. Resurrection became a possibility for them. It became something to believe in and it changed everything. It allowed for hope and for passion and for a sense of purpose!

When Jesus unpacked the scripture for the two disciples their hearts began to burn. When they came to the end of their journey they said, "Do not go! Stay with us for the day is nearly over!" They were longing for more information, for additional possibilities. They had begun to hope again because they became reminded of what they knew all along. Death was not the end for Messiah! Death was a necessary obstacle that had to be overcome to demonstrate that the old things have indeed passed away! We have always done it this way was no longer a reason for continuing to do it this way! They were beginning to imagine new possibilities!

When they sat down to the meal they were still learning from this unrecognized stranger that had come into their lives and begun to teach them what they already knew! It was sunset on the first day of the week, the day after the end of Passover. The bread they ate was the bread of first fruit. It contained yeast for the first time in a week. It was risen! As Jesus blessed and broke the risen bread, in it the disciples saw the risen Christ, the risen Messiah, the “Bread of Life!” and they recognized him for who he was! They recognized him as the light that had come into the world and the darkness could not overcome it! Even at the end of the day, as darkness surrounded them, they recognized the light! They recognized life!

When we went to Fremont Street at the end of the day on the first day of the week it was dark outside but we entered not a dark street leading to desolation, death, and destruction. We entered a light! We entered into the largest lightscreen in the world, a setting that lit up the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it! It was the light of a new life that had dawned on the death of an old and overused area. It was a light that dawned on new possibilities and new realities! It was a recognizable resurrected light that brought life! It made a difference.

Freemont Street is by no means intended to compare to the resurrected Jesus! It is a metaphor for the new reality we all exist in now that Easter has dawned and the “Light of the World” has once again made Himself known. Resurrection changes everything! It demands that we set aside what we have known, that we no longer do things the way we have always done them, that we move with an new sense of purpose!

That very hour the disciples recognized this new reality! They could no longer stay in their home! They set out in the dark of the world with a light that had dawned on them in the breaking of the bread! They could not wait to share that light with their friends. No doubt they ran along the road where they had earlier walked filled only with sadness. Now they knew what they could not have even hoped before! Now they were called to share something with others that they themselves had thought impossible just a few hours earlier.

They met up with the 11 and their companions who also knew! Jesus, the crucified Christ, was raised from the dead! He made himself known to Simon and to these two in the breaking of the bread! He was real! He was the new reality and new life was possible in Him! They knew!

Even though they knew, however, they still struggled. While they were talking about these things Jesus came and stood among them. This time they had no trouble recognizing him! They accepted his

appearance but they were still terrified. Once again, Jesus was there to listen to their doubts. He demonstrated his reality and opened their minds to new possibilities! Their lives were changed! They now existed in Him. He is the “way, the truth, the life!”

Today the people of Freemont Street can testify to their success. Their fear of failure is a distant memory! There is new life in their midst and that newness lets them live and move and have their being with a sense of freedom because they believe. Before they doubted but now they believe because they have seen, they have tasted, they have touched and they have heard the sounds of their new life! Today, we have that same opportunity. We can recognize the Easter matters! We can affirm that resurrection changes everything!

In order for us to make this affirmation however, we must go forth to witness. Resurrection means everything to those who are willing to experience resurrection! It means nothing to those who only know the despair, darkness and doubt of this world! Unless we do as Jesus invites his disciples to do, to go as witness to all these things, resurrection means nothing! Life in Jesus’ name is only life if we choose to make that life our reality! We can walk away from the events of Easter or we can affirm that *He walks and He talks with us!* The reality you choose is really up to you! Amen!