

“When Disillusioned, Talk to Strangers”

Luke 24:15-35 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ {26 Or Messiah; also in verse 46} have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

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Disillusionment is a fact of life in a fallen world. It hits us whenever our expectations of life or our illusions, one might say, fall apart because of reality. Disillusionment comes from many sources. There is disillusionment with nation or with the system or with the CD set that was supposed to teach me French. Anything involving human relationships, anything involving the need to trust another will sire disillusionment.

Marriage has its moments and even years of disillusionment. Spouses have their own ideas about how a marriage should be. They have their own ideas of who they person they married is or ought to be. Sooner or later, those illusions fall apart and one could say that's when marriage really starts.

People in general serve as a great source for disillusionment. We all have our ideas of who each other is, but without fail reality sets in and we catch a glimpse of who a person really is. The hardest work of friendship is setting aside our illusions and truly getting to know people the people we claim to know. We can even be disillusioned with ourselves. When you hear someone say, "I don't know who I am anymore" it is most likely the result the illusions we have about ourselves falling by the wayside.

Churches can be very disillusioning places. We can have our expectations of how Christians out to be, how churches out to be, how ministers out to be. But reality can set in and we have to realize that the church is at heart a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints as Dear Abby, Abigail van Buren, once penned.

Probably the hardest disillusionment to come to grips with is disillusionment with God. We have our expectations or illusions about what a

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good and loving God out to be doing, but what do we do when God doesn't fill the bill? Why does a good and loving God allow bad things to happen to good people and good things to happen for bad people? Why is it that some of the most caring and devout people we know have the most undeservingly horrible things happen to them? These are tough questions.

This sort of disillusionment is where Jesus' disciples found themselves in the wake of his crucifixion. God didn't fill the bill. Jesus, as Luke writes, “a man, a mighty prophet in word and deed before God and all the people” had been betrayed by one of his disciples and handed over to the Romans by the chief priests and rulers of the Jews to be condemned to death and crucified. His disciples had believed that he would be the one, the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ who would deliver Israel from Roman occupation and establish the Kingdom of God. These two disciples hung around Jerusalem until the third day when Jesus said he would rise from the dead. But...well, some of the women had been to the tomb that morning and found it empty and said some angels appeared telling them Jesus had been raised and to tell the men that he'd meet them in Galilee. Back then, grieving women were not seen as credible witnesses (women in general for that matter.) But, you know, it says a lot about the upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God when Jesus chooses women to be his first witnesses to his resurrection.

These two disciples were disillusioned with God, very disillusioned. Imagine dedicating your life and savings to a charismatic leader and his cult and the one prophecy upon which the whole thing hinges doesn't seem to come about except as the fantasy of a couple of grieving women. That's where they're at. It's hurts enough when bad things happen to good people, but in their case a very bad thing had happened to a very good person and it had cost them everything.

So, why does God allow this sort of disillusionment? Well, in the twenty minutes allotted for this sermon all I can say is that we have some very naïve illusions and expectations concerning God that keep us from seeing who God really is, who we really are, and the way reality really is. The only way out of this illusionment is disillusionment and it hurts. It's as if God has to appear evil to us before we can see him as he truly is. It's bizarre. It's twisted and it hurts. Yet, disillusionment with God is a fact of life and I dare say if you've never been disillusioned with God then you probably aren't in the game of life and are sitting the bench in la-la land.

To get beyond disillusionment with God we must do that one thing our parents always told us not to do; talk to strangers. Another way of saying this is opening up a window of hospitality in our lives by which God may address us with the truth. I'm not talking about walking up to people on the street and asking their advice. Rather, I'm talking about the importance of Christian community. You see, Jesus Christ crucified and raised is present to his people in the body of the church. It is in Christian fellowship, Christian fellowship gathered around the Lord's table in the act of hearing and interpreting Scripture that our eyes are opened that we may recognize him who is simply invisible to us. There's only one way out of disillusionment with God and that is for Christ Jesus to meet us as

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a stranger and open us up while opening up the Scriptures to us. Jesus Christ personally makes us each able to recognize God and typically does it in the midst of Christian's gathered for worship, prayer, study, and eating. Real, living encounter with Jesus Christ, that's the only way beyond disillusionment with God.

Sometimes I have to tell myself to refrain from the Greek lesson during the sermon, but I don't listen to well. The Greek word for “open”, which Luke uses both for Jesus explaining the Scriptures and for the eyes of the disciples being opened, is worth pondering. It isn't simply to open something. It is to open something thoroughly and I would go on to say that the effect on the recipient of the opening is that of an utterly new way of understanding something that changes the way you see everything. Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit opens Scripture to us that we might understand who he is, who God is, and that seeing changes the way we see the world. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes that we may see Jesus, though invisible we perceive his presence with us as the crucified and risen one who in the steadfast love and faithfulness of God gave himself for us. The reason we gather together for worship and Bible study and fellowship dinners isn't because it's our duty, or to listen to some talking head, or it seems the likely place to strike a bargain with God, or we're such losers that a “museum of saints” is the only bit of social life that we have. The reason we come together as the Body of Christ is to encounter HIM, to grow in HIM. The LORD is here in our midst and so we come.

Christian community is a special kind of community. Among us, within the space of the relationships that we share with each other Jesus is present to minister to us and through us to one another. The church is a unique community. We are strangers whom God has called to together to participate in the Beloved Stranger's ministry of opening us up to receive the Word and to see him. He has called us together to meet each other on the road of disillusionment, of doubt, and fear, and broken-heartedness, and shame, and guilt and stop one another in our tracks so that we may stand still before one another in all our broken glory and then together bring Scripture to bear upon our lives and gather around a table. In the midst of that kind of fellowship the love of Jesus Christ dwells richly. Friends, let us gather around the table of our LORD. Amen.