

**What now?**  
***The Road to Emmaus***  
**Luke 24:13-35**  
**Layne Lebo**  
**April 7, 2024**

Last Sunday, we had a great time celebrating Jesus' resurrection! As I reflected on the time immediately following Jesus' resurrection, it occurred to me that a thought that must have been on the minds of the first followers of Jesus was, "Jesus has risen from the dead—but what now?"

Knowing what we know as we look back 2,000 years in hindsight, we understand what happened on Easter Sunday, but as Pastor Evan pointed out last week, for Jesus' disciples, what was going on that Sunday was shrouded in mystery. When the women who first went to the tomb reported to the disciples that Jesus' body was gone, Luke tells us the disciples "did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." After Peter decided to go to the tomb himself and realized Jesus' body was no longer there, Luke writes, "And [Peter] went away wondering to himself what had happened." Jesus was alive, but even his closest followers struggled to figure out what had taken place.

When we think about the storyline of the New Testament, most of us jump from Jesus' resurrection to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came on all the believers—but what about the 50 days between Easter and Pentecost? This morning and next week, as we study Luke 24, I want us to consider this time period we tend to quickly skip over.

In the past several years, I've become acquainted with the word liminal. "Liminal" comes from a Latin word meaning "threshold," and it refers to a period of transition between what we've known and the unknown future. Here's an online definition for liminal: "The uncertain transition between where you've been and where you're going physically, emotionally, or metaphorically. To be in a liminal space means to be on the precipice of something new but not quite there yet."

Following Jesus' resurrection, his followers were in a liminal state. Imagine the roller coaster ride they were on. For three years, they had been with Jesus day and night. Initially, Jesus instructed them to leave everything and follow Him, and they obeyed, but to stay with

Him for three years, there had to be more going on than just his command for them to follow him. The disciples were captivated by Jesus. His teaching enthralled them. His ability to circumvent the natural order amazed them. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, turned water into wine, and commanded the wind and waves to be quiet and they obeyed. Jesus' teaching and the works He did made it clear that the kingdom of God had arrived.

On multiple occasions throughout those three years, Jesus told his disciples He was going to be arrested, killed, and later raised to life, but they couldn't comprehend what He was talking about. During Passover week, what we now know as Holy Week, events began to speed up. Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to a hero's welcome. Throughout that week, the simmering conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders began to boil with greater intensity. At the Passover meal on Thursday evening, Jesus seemed very somber, and his words and actions confused them even more than normal. Then they went to the Garden of Gethsemane, a favorite spot of Jesus, and the mood became even heavier. Jesus was grieving, and He seemed unusually vulnerable, urging his disciples to pray with Him and becoming frustrated with them when they couldn't stay awake.

Later, Judas, accompanied by a mob, captured Jesus and took Him away, and everything went downhill fast. Jesus was arrested and tried as a criminal. He was mocked and ridiculed, condemned to be crucified, and forced to carry his own cross to the execution site. Jesus was hoisted onto a cross and left to die. It was over so fast. Then on the Sunday after Jesus' crucifixion on Friday, the women who visited the tomb came back with the unbelievable story that Jesus' body was gone, and when Peter ran to see for himself, their report was confirmed. The stone was rolled away from the tomb, Jesus' burial clothes were neatly folded, and his body was nowhere to be found. What had happened?

In a moment, we'll read about two people who encountered Jesus as they traveled on Easter Sunday evening, but before we read that account, I want us to put ourselves in the shoes of Jesus' followers that Sunday. Imagine the grief and sense of loss you'd have felt after Jesus' death. Jesus has been dead since Friday, and while you're still sad, you need to begin to put your grief aside and get on with life. And then throughout the day on Sunday, you begin to hear

strange claims that Jesus' body wasn't in the tomb. Some of the more emotional people in your group have even made the ridiculous claim that Jesus is alive. Jesus' resurrection is a nice fantasy, but it's time to move on now and get back to life as usual. You have a job to work, a family to provide for, a life to live...

I'm going to begin reading at verse 13 of Luke chapter 24. Remember the last words that Luke wrote describe Peter "wondering to himself what had happened" as he walked away from the tomb.

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

It's easy to be hard on the disciples for their inability to understand Jesus' clear words about his death and resurrection, but the gospels often say something like, "But they were kept from seeing the truth." And here we're told, "But they were kept from recognizing him." In God's timing, the disciples weren't ready to understand Jesus' words about his crucifixion and resurrection. Let's pick up reading again at verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

Before I continue reading, I want us to think a moment about the identity of these travelers. As I began studying this passage, I asked myself the question, "Who were these two travelers?" We're told one of them was named Cleopas, but who was Cleopas and who was the other person? What I'm going to share with you now is speculation, but many Bible scholars

subscribe to these ideas, and personalizing these travelers helps us slow down to think about what may have been occurring.

I'm going to share these thoughts quickly, but you can research it further if you'd like. Some scholars speculate that the person with Cleopas was his wife, Mary. John's Gospel indicates that Mary, the wife of Clopas (Cleopas) was with Jesus' mother, Mary, at the cross. Cleopas is believed by some to be the younger brother of Jesus' father, Joseph. It would make sense that Mary, Jesus' mother, would be accompanied by her sister-in-law at the cross. This is speculation, but it helps us slow down to view this exchange as a real event, rather than glossing over it quickly, and it puts some flesh on what is a bare-bones account.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" <sup>19</sup> "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

As Cleopas and the other traveler interact with Jesus, we see the difficult place they find themselves in. They had placed their faith in Jesus, but He was killed, and now they're perplexed by the reports that Jesus' body isn't at the tomb and that reportedly angels have given the message that Jesus is alive. In verse 25, we read Jesus' response:

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

<sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

<sup>32</sup> 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?”

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Jesus’ explanation was compelling and thorough, but they didn’t recognize who He was until He broke bread and gave it to them. “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” Immediately, Jesus disappeared from their sight. The two travelers realized then that the man they had been walking with was Jesus, and they immediately got up and walked/ran back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples and others who were with them and reported all that had happened to them.

Jesus has risen, and as we’ll hear more about in the weeks ahead, He has sent his Holy Spirit to live inside us. We have the advantage of knowing those truths in a way that his 1<sup>st</sup> Century followers were still learning, but like Jesus’ disciples and like the two people on the Emmaus Road, we continue to wait.

Few of us like waiting, but it occurred to me as I was working on this sermon that our journey with Jesus is all about waiting. During Advent, we celebrate Jesus' birth and await his second coming. In Lent, we remember Jesus' suffering and sacrifice and await his resurrection. After Easter, we wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And we constantly await Jesus' return for his church. The waiting never ends. Someone has said that as Christians, we live in the "already but not yet." Jesus has come, and the kingdom of God has arrived, and yet we wait for Jesus' second coming and for the Kingdom of God to be fulfilled. With Jesus we pray, "Father, your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

For the past number of years on Easter morning, I've attended the sunrise service First United Methodist Church hosts at the Mechanicsburg Cemetery just a short distance from here, next to the church building where McBIC was founded in 1890. One of the phrases that First U.M.'s youth pastor, Lisa Aronson, uses every year is that we're "Easter people." I love that phrase, "Easter people," because it sets us apart as those who place our faith in Jesus. Easter people live our lives with the assurance that Jesus didn't stay in the grave. He rose to life. Since Jesus rose to life, our perspective as Easter people is different from that of every other person. You and I have the hope, the assurance, the faith that comes from knowing Jesus is alive. He's alive, and He is with us no matter what we face.

Waiting isn't fun, and most of us don't like waiting, and yet the Bible assures us of an important truth. As Easter people, we don't wait alone. God is with us. What are you currently waiting for? What are the most pressing needs on your mind and heart today? What are you praying for God to do in your life or in the life of someone you love? As we wait, hope is essential, and hope isn't some vague sense that everything will turn out OK. Our hope rests in the person of Jesus Christ, who told us He will never leave us or forsake us—that He is making all things new.

I ask again: what are you currently waiting for? What are the most pressing needs on your mind and heart? What are you praying for God to do in your life or in the life of someone you love?"As you ponder those questions, I encourage you to receive the words of truth Jesus spoke to his disciples in John 14, when He told them that He'd soon be leaving.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. – John 14:1–6

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. – John 14:16–18

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:26–27

The Holy Spirit has rightly been called the "forgotten person of the Trinity," because while most of us are very familiar with God the Father and with Jesus, the Holy Spirit can be nebulous and mysterious for us. It's the Holy Spirit, Jesus' Spirit, that Jesus sent to be with us everywhere we go. Between now and Pentecost on Sunday, May 19, we'll be focusing on Jesus' promises regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit. On this first Sunday after Easter, I encourage us to ask Jesus that our awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives might be heightened and that we would grow in being attuned to hearing his voice and following his lead. One of the common words used for the Holy Spirit literally means "One called alongside to help." Jesus is

not distant from us. His Holy Spirit lives in us and is walking along side of us. If God is stirring your heart with a desire to sense his Spirit and hear his voice more clearly, I encourage you to go to one of our prayer partners and ask them to pray with you.

My prayer is that each of us would go forth today as Easter people, embracing the hope we have in Jesus, knowing that whatever we face, we're not alone because the Holy Spirit is with us—living inside of us!