

“GOING FOR A WALK”
A Sermon Preached at
FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Belleville, IL
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(transcribed from audio file)

The scripture reading for today is taken from the book of Luke 24:13-25.

And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his

glory?

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

And they said one to another; Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. NRSV

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I started up a routine of walking early in the morning. I thought, oh, I'll start this during a heat wave. That's smart. I actually started before this heat wave stuff started, but it's been a real challenge to keep up this early morning habit. Many of you know I am not an early morning person. I was at a staff meeting and Rhonda, our director of Christian Discipleship said, "Really? You're doing that? Good for you. That's hard for you."

I felt very affirmed. That was very nice of her. But yeah. I get out there and I started off doing it having ear buds in. Most days though I just turned them off or I take them out because I just enjoy hearing the sounds of nature and just kinda like taking it in and having that be just some kind of sacred time for me. Although I'm just not very good at making it a sacred time and walking along and moseying cause I want to get some benefit out of this. So, we got to move.

You just can't do this at an easy pace, so I got one of these watches that tells me the pace that I'm doing. So now I gotta make a certain time. Like I gotta do faster than a 16-minute mile. You know. It's gotta be faster than that, so I'm working these

different. . . I'm trying to pull it along as fast as I can and there are other people doing it too.

I've noticed there's a weird kind of etiquette when you're on the walking path with other people, you know? It's not just the bicycles that are coming up behind you screaming, "**On your left!**" And then they zoom by. A lot of people, as you're walking toward them, they put their head down. Like 25 feet away they make eye contact with you and then you start to get close, the head goes down. It's like, "I'm not talking with you." And then we pass along the path.

Occasionally there is a friendly person who I think is afraid that the volume of what they are listening to will cause them to sound weird because what they do is they mouth, hey there, as you walk by. I guess they're afraid of going "**Hello!**" because their music is so loud, so you get the silent hello and a wave as you go by. This happens all the time.

After a while I felt like I'm seeing the same people. I feel like I should get to know these folks. We're doing this weird, awkward, silent hellos, or putting our head down, so I decided to try something out and what I did was, I just stopped. This guy was walking toward me, and I just stopped and took out my ear buds and I looked at him and that caused him to stop. He probably thought, oh no. What is this guy going to do to me. Right? And I said "Hi! I see you walking here every day. My name is Rob." And he was like, "Um. My name is Tai."

"Well, Hi Tai. How are you?" And we talked a little bit and on we went. Now, every day I walk, "Hey Tai. How you doin'?" Then I noticed he does this. "Oh hey. Hi." He does not remember my name.

So, a couple of weeks ago I did the trick. I walked up to him and said, "Hey Tai. It's Rob. Good to see you."

"Oh. Oh. Rob." We got back on track then.

But there's all sorts of things going on. All sorts of people along the way and a couple of weeks ago, I don't know if you remember this, but we had the sermon about the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan walking along the path and then someone was down on the side of the road and then the priest and the Levite, you know the old equivalent of what a pastor would be, just walked on by.

Well, so I was walking and I was trying to keep my pace because I had already stopped and talked with Tai for a little bit and I was losing my time. I needed to get my time, so I was just truckin' along and then I look off to the side and I see a woman standing there on the side of the road and her dog is laying down in the grass and there is another woman already there. So, obviously the dog is having a problem and it's this woman's dog and there is a woman already there helping.

And I think, there was a moment where my mind went, there's already someone helping, Rob. You're good. You can keep going, but the problem was I was preaching on the Good Samaritan that week, so it was in my head. I thought I don't want to be like the Levite or the priest, I have to stop. So that's when the good Christian part of me kicked in and I stopped and said, "Is everything okay?" It turned out the dog had just collapsed, the dog was old and having problems and so we all got to meet one another and there was just this lovely moment of community, helping out this woman and her dog.

Jade, that was the woman who was there, she went to her house and brought water back and then the woman's son came, and we got a blanket underneath the dog, and we lifted him up. This dog was heavy as God. I mean this was a big dog and we get this thing up and into the little wagon they had brought. So, I've seen them since, and the dog is doing okay now.

But it's just so easy in our lives to be just on our path, with our goal, that causes us to say, I need to keep going in this moment. But we're invited to take some time to make some spaces in our lives to see where God might be saying something to us, or an opportunity to be part of God's mercy might be right there around us.

In our lesson today it's kind of curious that this big scene of Jesus appearing to these folks happens along the road.

In Luke's gospel there are all kinds of things that happen at the temple. The temple is so important. You would think that the risen Christ would appear in the temple and that would have been the moment. Out of all the gospel writers, Luke loves the temple. The other three are done with it to a certain extent.

Matthew presents Jesus as kind of the replacement for the temple. No longer do we need the temple. We now have Jesus.

Mark just sees it as a corrupt place where the leaders have gone astray and we need to focus here on Jesus.

John comes from a community that was rejected from the temple, so he's got no love lost there.

But Luke is our one gospel writer that holds the temple in high esteem and yet when it comes to some of the most important scenes in the gospel of Luke, they don't happen at the temple. They happen around a meal which is why I'm thoroughly convinced that Jesus was Presbyterian. I mean if it would have been some chicken salad and ham sandwiches and a casserole, that's definitely Presbyterian right there. But it's in the moment of the meal they recognize him. He took the bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and immediately their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

That's from the gospel of Luke. That's from our communion liturgy. This is the moment when they recognized him. It's so odd, but there is something about the risen Christ where he's not recognized immediately when they see him. I don't know if the physical appearance is so very different. I don't know what it is about it, but it's part of the account we hear again and again.

He bumps into them. They have this encounter, and Jesus inquires as to what's wrong. "What's going on with you?" He enters into their sadness and grief with them which is often the entry point for a lot of us – the point of sadness, of grief, pain. It becomes our entry point back into a deeper connection with our faith. And it is for them. And then he says to them, "Well actually all this pain you are experiencing was necessary. It's in the scriptures. Don't you know?"

And then Jesus proceeds to give them what I imagine was the best Bible Study that has ever happened in all of human history. The risen Christ walks them through the entire scriptures of the Old Testament explaining how it was to be. And they accept all this knowledge and all this wonder, and they still don't get it. They still don't get what's going on.

And as they get to the destination Jesus continues on and they say, "Wait a minute, friend. Excuse me. Come. It's late. You should" They make space for him. Not just as someone along the journey, but they make space for Christ in their lives. And as they set out to be a host to Jesus as so often is the case when we make space to host God in our lives, he takes over the host position. It's the position of the host to pick up the bread and give the blessing and break it.

I think what Luke is trying to tell us in this scripture is that if you will make space in your life for the presence of Christ, you will find that he will be hosting you, that he will have a word for you, but it takes us making that space.

You know, along one of those walks, as I was trying to crank out my time, I had already spent some time talking with Tai. We see each other every time. But as I was going along then there was this woman, and she was with her dog and she was going just fast enough that I couldn't overtake her at the pace I was doing. But it was just at the point where I wasn't going fast enough to go by her, but I wasn't going slow enough that she was gaining ground. So, I was doing this creepy kind of 10 feet behind her walk and I'm sure it didn't make her feel good, but I'm trying, but you keep speeding up when I speed up and so it was hard to get ahead of her. I mean, she was cookin' with that dog.

Eventually I got up near her and I looked over and I noticed that the dog she was walking looked just like the dog that my next-door neighbor, Walter Frankey, used to have. The Frankeys never had a dog for the longest time. I don't think the dad liked dogs was what it was but eventually they gave in, and they got this little rust colored dog.

I just jumped right into a conversation with the woman. I don't know if she was expecting it. "My neighbors used to have a dog just like that. What kind of dog is that?"

She's like, "I don't know."

I thought, okay Rob, just keep walking. So, I started to pick up the pace and she went, "Actually I got this dog from a shelter."

And I said, "Oh, I got my dog from a shelter too."

She goes, "Yeah. It had ingested some poison, and it was not expected to live. They were going to put it down because of the daily care of it. You had to pick it up and take it outside. "The dog wasn't doing well so they were going to put the dog down, but I heard about this, and I took the dog in. I took care of the dog until it got its strength back. It actually made it through the poison."

"Wow. That's an amazing story."

She goes, “That’s not all.” She said, “Once the dog was able to move around every morning when I got up the dog would come over and take his paw and tap the back of my left calf at the exact same spot and whine.” Every morning it would do that to her.

At this time, she was going through some health challenges, and she was going to the doctor for regular visits and they were scanning her body because she was having some problems with lesions on her upper body. She told the doctor, “There’s this weird thing happening with the dog. Every morning he comes up and taps the back of my leg and whines and I know you’re going to think I’m crazy doctor, but will you also scan my leg?”

And the doctor was like, uh, and just talked his way out of it. The next time she was in she pressed it. “The dog keeps doing this and I really want you to do it.”

So, they went ahead and did a scan of her leg. A couple days later she gets a phone call from her doctor’s office saying “You’re not going to believe this, but we need you to come in right away. There’s a lesion inside your left calf and if we don’t remove it, you might lose your leg.”

“Yeah!” I’m just standing there. Sweat dripping down me cause I had a good pace going and. . . . “Now it’s good for the dog to walk and it’s good for me to walk and I was able to keep my leg, so, we walk every morning.”

I was like I would walk every morning with that dog too if that happened. You can say, oh yeah, I’ve heard that some dogs can detect things like that. Look somebody made that dog and I think it was God, so I don’t know if that was just the way God made that wonderful creature or if that was an intervention of God into that woman’s life, but what a lovely story to have.

I think that when we make space for encounters you never know when God’s going to tell you a story. You never know when God’s going to whisper something in your heart. You never know when God’s going to give you a little poke and say, pay attention to this.

You see for all of what Luke presents in his gospel to us, at the end of the day what Luke wants us to hear is this, some of the deepest parts of our spiritual connection with Christ are going to come with ordinary things like a walk, like a meal. The trick is getting us to make that space in our lives for the Holy to be there.

We think we're setting up space for God, to receive God in our lives and really what we're doing is we're making space so that God can receive us in that moment because we need that encounter along our own road to Emmaus again and again because God has something to speak into all of our hearts again and again.

So, what I want to encourage you to think about something in your own life that you could make it a Holy space. I will tell you that these encounters that make ----- I don't listen to music at all anymore when I'm on that walk. I just walk and I listen for what God wants me to hear that morning. I'm still keeping a good pace, people, but I'm listening, looking. Maybe for you it's not a walk like that. Maybe for you it's a morning coffee where you just sit and say, I'm going to make this a space where I just listen.

A lot of our prayer time is spent talking, in our mind or with our lips. Perhaps we need a little more prayer time with our ears where we just sit in silence and wonder, what is God saying to me through the people in my life, through the actions that happen around me, leaving that open. So, maybe it's morning coffee, maybe it's a walk, maybe it's something else you do every day, maybe it's brushing your teeth. I hope you all brush your teeth at least once a day. Maybe it's flossing. Does anyone really floss? But just, I'm going to make this Holy time. It's okay. You can make anything Holy time. During this time period I'm just going to open up my mind to reflect upon what is happening in my life because we need to hear that voice, whispering across our heart. But I think you can start with an invitation that you make.

May God be glorified by what you hear, by what you see, and then by what you do.

Halleluiah and Amen.