

Sunday – May 8, 2011
Pastor - Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **Emmanuel**

St. Matthias UMC
Fredericksburg, Va 22405
www.stmatthiasumc.org

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

Easter. Emmaus, 7 miles from Jerusalem.

1. Emmaus is where we go to get away, to forget for a while, when we give up on thinking that the world holds anything sacred because what we believed just didn't work out - where is the love, the freedom, the justice?: going to a movie, vacationing at the beach, buying some new clothes or a new car, reading a novel.

The Risen Lord meets us on the road to our Emmauses, in the ordinary places and experiences of our lives - even in the places we go when life is too much. But, he may not come the way we might expect him to come. He may not be recognizable to us at first.

2. The two disciples recognize Jesus at the table. They had not planned it as a sacred moment, but it became one because they had unknowingly invited Jesus to eat with them. They share their table with a stranger, and they discover they'd been in the presence of the Lord.

This is sort of a reversal of the parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. In that story, the rich man knows Lazarus is starving to death right at his front gate, but doesn't give him a moment's consideration. He leaves him there, for the dogs to come and lick his wounds. When the two of them die, Lazarus goes to heaven to be with Abraham, and the rich man goes to hell. He can see Lazarus and Abraham from where he is, but he can never join them. The table in his house had been a symbol of the haves while the poor Lazarus, who needed only crumbs from that table to survive, never gets anything at all from the table. He is truly a have-not.

When we see what happens in Emmaus, when the two disciples invite Jesus to join them at the table, we can only ask, What might have been revealed to the rich man if only he'd invited Lazarus to eat with him?

3. The most startling detail of this entire well-developed story is that Jesus

vanishes the second they realize who he was. God's presence in our lives can be like that: dancing on the edge of our awareness, our perception. God's faithful can sense his presence in that fleeting moment, before the mundane closes in again.

For this reason, most of our religious experiences speak most clearly to us in retrospect, as we look back and examine them to see what really happened. Once the men realized who had been with them, they ask each other, "Did our hearts not burn within us?" when Jesus was walking with them on the road.

We are like Moses, who could see God only from behind (Exodus 33:23). We are like Job, who said, "Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him; he moves on, but I do not perceive him." (Job 9:11)

We can have a vital spiritual life only if we learn to appreciate the importance of meeting God in the past as well as the present. We must learn to reflect on our day, to examine moments when we might have been enjoying God's presence more than usual.

4. The experience of the presence of God is not a private gift to be stored in a precious place, away from the prying eyes of the world. It is never for us alone. It is typical of every story about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances that the witnesses immediately go and tell someone - "He is risen!" "He is alive!" "The Lord has risen indeed!" (Luke 24: 5, 23, 34-35)

Not everyone will believe. These may seem like idle tales to them. But, to anyone who has felt the presence of God in their hearts, these reports will resonate in a way that they will know them to be true.

5. Easter did not end at sundown that first Easter. It continued to excite and inspire the followers of Jesus. It stretches all the way to us today, and will stretch into the rest of our lives. Even though the women who found the empty tomb could not call back the angels, and even though the two disciples in Emmaus may never meet the stranger again, it doesn't matter. Life would never be the same again. The Gospel story continues. It is an extension of the Easter story: The Lord is risen, and he comes to meet us wherever we are - on the road to Emmaus, in our recliner in front of the TV, in the book we're reading just for fun, at the local bar, in church, it doesn't matter where we are. Jesus comes, looking for us, hoping to ignite a spark

within us and watch us burn, bright and hot, sharing his kingdom, his love, with the people around us. We don't have to tell people that he is risen, but they need to be able to see it in our lives.