

May 6, 2018
Life Together in Christ (9)
You Are Witness of These Things
Luke 24:33-35
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The Emmaus Road story doesn't conclude with a nice meal and a good night's sleep. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had been transformed in Christ's presence – from dazed and dejected wanderers to confident and joyful bearers of good news. They couldn't wait to tell their story. So they got up and returned to Jerusalem to share their experience with other disciples. And they found out that they were not alone in having experienced the post-resurrection Jesus! There were other people who had experienced Jesus' presence. Each encounter with Jesus was unique. There was a whole group of Christ-followers who shared stories of how Jesus appeared to them. Together they pondered, celebrated and made meaning of their stories.

The Emmaus Road account illustrates the key movements in the spiritual life – from the more private and personal encounter with Jesus into the larger community of others who have also encountered Jesus in life-changing ways. When these two disciples left Jerusalem and returned to Emmaus, they felt like giving up and leaving everything they had hoped for behind. Now they were returning to Jerusalem with the knowledge that Jesus' presence is not restricted to a certain place. Christ-followers can encounter Jesus wherever they are, even when they feel lonely. Sometimes we need to share an intimate journey with friends in order to fully encounter Jesus. As we share stories of transformation with our friends, Jesus appears in our midst continuing to bring his peace, his presence and his perspective (Luke 24:36-37). While we are together, Jesus stands among us and sends us out on a mission to be his witnesses in the world.

The Emmaus Road story tells us that our own transformation in Christ's presence is what makes us share any kind of good news with others. Evangelism is an invitation to spiritual transformation. Evangelism becomes simply telling what had happened to us on the road and how Jesus has been making the ordinary extraordinary through his presence in our lives. When we share the story of how we have encountered Christ in a transforming way on our own road, evangelism becomes an invitation to the kind of deep and lasting change we are all longing for. We are inviting others into the fellowship of the burning

hearts. The best evangelists are people who can't wait to tell others what happened to them on the road and how Jesus met them.

As the sacred heart of Jesus is formed in us, we are able to discern loving, God-guided action in the world that Jesus loves. Being Christ in the world can take many forms:

- * evangelism and faith sharing
- * giving generously of our resources
- * being involved in reconciliation and peacemaking
- * working for justice
- * engaging the needs of the world with compassion and caring for the poor
- * working for the human community in Christ's name

As we engage in our mission in the world, we will inevitably experience our human limitations and our need for God's power, God's strength and God's wisdom. We will discover our tendency that we are pushing our agenda in our own strength rather than surrendering to the will of God already at work in the world. We will be driven back to prayer, casting ourselves upon God's mercy for what needs to be done in us and in the world around us.

Robert Mulholland wisely points out that there will always be "a creative tension between our spiritual pilgrimage and the world in which it is lived out. If we attempt to undo this difficult tension, we move either into an 'unworldly' spirituality that isolates us from the world or into a 'worldly' spirituality that isolates us from the radical demands of a vital relationship with God. (*Invitation to a Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 161.)

As we draw close to Christ, we find the courage to do what God asks us to do on behalf of the world he longs to save. We might discover that there is a shared mission God has in mind for us. We will discover what we are called to do together for the sake of the world. Together we will learn how to live within a constellation of beautiful paradoxes that are held together in creative tension. Love for God and love for neighbor. Solitude and community. Silence and word/Word. Prayer and action. Work and rest. Discerning and doing the will of God. Formation and mission. Just like the disciples who journeyed from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back again, we will learn how to move into the center and out and then back again. At every point along the way, Jesus' presence is where we are, causing our hearts to burn within us as we walk the road together.