

On the Road Again: Detours Ahead Luke 24.13-35

In the early days of my time here at FCBC I did a series entitled *Off Road Living* in which I compared the interim time to the sport of off-roading; that is, the driving of specialized vehicles over unpaved roads, into sand and gravel pits, down riverbeds, over rocks and other natural terrain; to Israel's journey through the wilderness.

The series began with a message entitled:

Spying Out the Land in which I talked about the story in Numbers 13 & 14 which tells us that upon arriving on the boarder of the Promised Land God instructed Moses to send a leader from each of the 12 tribes to spy out the land. We are further told that when the spies returned 10 of them gave a list of reasons why they shouldn't enter the land saying the people were too powerful, the cities too large and well defended, and was populated by Israel's enemies.

Caleb and Joshua were the only ones who spoke up to remind the people that God would be with them as they entered the land and that God would deliver the land to them as promised. I reminded you that God would be with FCBC during the interim time as well.

The next week we looked at Phil. 2.1-4 to learn about ***Staying Together***. In these verses Paul encourages the believers in Philippi to be like-minded, to be one in spirit and purpose and to look to the interest of others. He reminds them (and us) that because we are united in Christ and are able to share in Christ's mind and strength we can be united in love. I reminded you that FCBC also had the power to stay together during the off-road time because of what you have received from Christ as individuals and as a community of believers.

The third Sunday found us once again in the book of Philippians, this time in chapter 4, where in verses 4-7 we found some suggestions for ***Staying Calm***. I told you that staying calm is important when we are living in off road times because as we explore new territory we will hit a few bumps along the way. I suggested those bumps might include

specific problems, people and/or pressures. I suggested that utilizing Paul's advice to always rejoice, never be anxious, and to remain always prayerful would help everyone remain calm.

The final Sunday of the series saw us looking at Matt. 14 where we find two reports that encourage us to **Stay Focused** on Jesus. In the first we read the report of Jesus feeding a crowd of 5,000+ people with 5 loaves and 2 fishes; in the second we find a report about Jesus taking a walk on water and how by staying focused on Jesus Peter was able to do the same.

I suggested that because the **message** we carry "God so loved the world that he sent his only son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" hasn't changed; and the **mission** to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" hasn't changed but the **method** by which the message is delivered would probably need to change.

Today I am going to talk to you about entering what we might call the Promised Land...about this transition time into the land of having a new senior pastor. This is a time when the expectation may be that the ministries of the church will move forward with few if any problems. The reality is that this transition time and the road to ministry with Pastor Ong will present its own set of challenges, some unexpected detours.

I invite you to journey back in time with me to the morning of Resurrection Day. Early that morning a group of women went to the tomb where their rabbi, Jesus, who had been crucified was buried. When they arrived instead of finding his body they found an empty tomb!

The women rushed back to where the disciples were gathered to tell them about the two men dressed in brilliant white who had appeared and told them that Jesus was not there because he had risen from the dead just like he said he would. "He is Risen" the women told the disciples but they just couldn't believe it. Suddenly Peter decides that he has to see for himself so he ran to the tomb only to discover

that it really was empty. Puzzled by what he had seen, Peter wondered what had happened.

Later that same day we join two of Jesus' followers, one of whom is named Cleopas as they begin the seven mile walk from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. Their slow dragging footsteps are kicking up little puffs of dust as they walk. Their shoulders are slumped, their heads down – their voices barely audible. Despondent, depressed, despairing, they look as though they have just lost their best friend.

Into this scene comes a stranger – a man neither one recognizes – a man who walks alongside them and asks “what are you talking about?” After expressing their wonder at his ignorance in what I suspect may have been a rather sarcastic way, Cleopas and his companion proceed to tell the stranger all that had just happened in Jerusalem; their shattered hopes for a Messiah, Jesus' death and the puzzling report from the women.

Okay now, let's pause here for a minute or two...are you beginning to wonder what's up with those two followers? Don't they know the empty tomb is good news? Before we begin to shake our heads at them let's take a closer look. Although we may be wondering why they were puzzled by the empty tomb the reality is that Luke, the author of this Gospel never even hinted that any of the disciples expected the Resurrection. In fact, Luke reports that Jesus had to make multiple appearances to convince his followers that he was alive.

Perhaps if we take a look at ourselves we won't judge them too harshly. After all, we have a complete record of how God's promises have been fulfilled throughout the ages and yet we sometimes doubt the truth of that record.

We may also be wondering why they weren't able to recognize Jesus. Luke tells us they were his followers which would imply that they would have seen him at some point in time. Once again though let's take a look at ourselves before we jump to any conclusions about their blindness (or stupidity).

It is quite likely that we have all experienced moments when our worlds have been turned upside down, our

expectations left unmet, our hopes shattered. Some-times we are so caught up in our pain and dashed hopes we are unable to recognize God's presence and activity in our lives even when it is right in front of our faces.

It is also likely that many of us have experienced or witnessed God's grace and mercy in our lives and yet we still sometimes doubt whether what we saw or experienced was really God. We all are just so human aren't we?!

Lastly, we may wonder at the apparent sarcasm with which the two answered the stranger's question. However, once again I suggest we look at ourselves before we point a finger at Cleopas and his companion. I am willing to bet that we have all at one time or another responded to a question about how we are with sarcasm and disbelief because we think surely everyone must know what a difficult time we are having and then we proceed to tell in great detail just what is wrong in our lives.

With all of this in mind, perhaps we can understand a little bit better the level of despair the two were experiencing and forgive them for their snotty response to Jesus' question. Now, back to the story. Upon finishing their sad tale, I suspect the two were expecting the stranger to exhibit some sympathy and understanding.

Imagine their shock when the stranger, after listening to their tale of woe responded in a somewhat less than sympathetic manner saying "how dull, blind, and slow-witted you are!" And then, and then he had the audacity to begin to teach them as though they were children, questioning their understanding of Scripture and their understanding of just who the Messiah was.

Does any of this sound familiar? Have you ever poured out your heart to a friend only to have him or her proceed to tell you some hard truths? Now the fact is that sometimes we need to hear the hard truth – it doesn't mean we will like it but we need to hear it anyway. It has been my experience that the friends who love me most are the ones who are willing to say the hard things I need to hear.

Apparently our two friends not only needed to hear the truth they recognized it when they heard it! They were so

captivated by the message and the messenger that they ask this stranger to stay overnight in their home.

And they don't make just a polite offer of hospitality, they "strongly urge" the stranger to stay with them. Little did they know that they were at a crossroads; they could have been less insistent, they could have let the stranger continue his journey, they could have missed out on the opportunity to have their sorrow turned into joy.

Seeing how close Cleopas and his companion came to missing out on this exceptional blessing makes me wonder how many times I have missed out on God's blessings when I couldn't or wouldn't invite Jesus into all areas of my life.

When Jesus accepted their hospitality and reclined at the table with them an interesting role reversal occurred. In the Jewish tradition the host would be the one to offer the blessing of the meal. Perhaps the two were shocked speechless when Jesus picked up the bread and before they could gather their thoughts or say a word gave thanks and handed it to them.

In that moment their eyes were opened and they recognized him only to have him disappear! Their once broken hearts now burned so brightly with joy they were compelled to tell others so they walked or perhaps ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to share the Good News with the other followers who were gathered there. Imagine them arriving breathless and shaken and what happens?

Before they can catch their breath and open their mouths the group greets them with the news that Jesus has appeared to Simon! What a gift God gave all of them! Confirmation that Jesus is alive! Can you imagine how that room exploded with praise?

So what, you may be asking yourselves, does all of this have to do with detours? For today's purposes I am comparing Cleopas and his companion's journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus to a detour. The two of them had been listening to Jesus' teachings and following the road he had laid out for them.

I would imagine they were giving their all to this new rabbi when suddenly they found themselves on a detour; walking down a road without the leader they had come to love and respect, on whom they had pinned their hopes on. This new road was rough and rocky and seemed to be taking them away from all they thought they knew and hoped for.

Their detour into doubt and despair came to an end with Jesus' unexpected appearance. When they recognized who the stranger was they returned to the main road – the road filled with joy and assurance; the road that would allow them to continue on the journey God had called them to.

In the coming weeks and months you all may at times find yourselves on what feels or looks like a detour. You chose the way you thought God wanted you to go, you stepped out in faith and called Pastor Ong. You are on the verge of entering the Promised Land of ministry with a new senior pastor and yet in these coming weeks and months you may find yourselves on detours that feel like they are taking you away from your most beloved ways of doing worship and being church.

This detour might be scary because it is asking you to let go of some things and try new ways of ministering and following Jesus on the main road. This detour, such as it is, is going to require change...

You know the old joke don't you? The one about how many Baptists it takes to change a light bulb? Change!!! What do you mean change! Change is difficult even for those of us who don't mind it and yet change can enable us to be more effective in sharing the unchanging message of God's love with people. It can enable us to be more effective in engaging in the unchanging mission of Christ's followers to go into the world and share the Gospel.

The heart of my message today is this: when you find yourselves on a detour of any kind remember that Jesus is there. Wherever you are in your journey, be it on the main road or navigating a detour, Jesus is there. Whether you recognize him or not he is there.

And one last thing about detours, it is often on what we think is a detour that we have our most profound experiences with God. May it be so with you as you journey into the Promised Land with a new Senior Pastor.