

Resurrection and Emmaus
Luke 24:1-35
Week 11

Opening Prayer

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

Gracious God, as we come together to place our lives in front of your Holy Word, we pray that you would give us wisdom and understanding. May we approach this sacred text with humility, curiosity, expectancy and love. Be among us and in our conversation through the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of the one to whom this whole story points, Jesus the Christ, amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Each week, give an opportunity for folks to either respond to the check-in question below or, if they'd rather, share something that came up for them as they were reading the other texts assigned for the Big Read this week.

"Some ideas are brain deep, not life deep." A.W. Tozer

In many respects this is what some believe about the resurrection. We believe Jesus died, was buried and rose from the dead. We know the tomb was empty that first Easter morning, but for some it only goes as far as their brains. The idea of the resurrections being real should not, and cannot just stay brain deep. It needs to go life deep. What exactly does this mean? The empty tomb changes how you live. It is not just an event celebrated once a year. It is a daily reality that affects how and why you live your life. It changes your perspective from living for the here and now to living for eternity. The empty tomb changes the idea of Jesus being a good man, to Jesus being the Savior of the world. Anyone can die for someone else, but only God can defeat death and come back. There is no single event in all of history that has had a greater impact on all of mankind more than the resurrection.

On the first Easter morning no one expected the tomb to be empty. They even went there with burial spices to put on the body. The empty tomb changed this group of disciples to become heralds of the gospel throughout the world. The price would be high. Paul and Peter were both martyred in Rome. Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down. For them the empty tomb was not just head deep, it was life deep.¹

What does the empty tomb mean to you? How does it impact your life? If this is difficult to answer in the present tense, how might you HOPE the empty tomb and Christ's resurrection will change the way you live from now on?

Background

In chapter 24, Luke presents three stories that point to Jesus' resurrection. We will focus on the first two. All of Luke's Easter stories are set in or near Jerusalem. The long Easter day of Luke's Gospel begins in confusion and wonder, and by day's end has taken on liturgical rhythms and shape, as memory forms a bridge from the present back to the past and forward into the future.

Verses 1-12

Sabbath law had kept Jesus' followers from completely preparing His body before burial. They had to wait through Saturday before returning to the tomb Sunday morning. (See Luke 23:54,56.) Once the day of rest had passed, a small group of His followers got up early on Sunday—the first day of the week—to finish the job. While Luke is not specific until later in the account, these disciples were all women. The women carried spices that would be spread between the layers of the grave clothes. The process may have temporarily hidden the unpleasant odor created by decomposition. It also would have provided some sense of closure to His followers.

The women were perplexed. They knew something had happened but had no explanation at this point. It could have been that they had lost Jesus to death; now they had "lost" His body. In the midst of their confusion, they faced another startling event. Suddenly, two individuals appeared in their midst. Luke called them men, but that reflects the women's perspective. These beings were angels. Just as angels announced Jesus' birth to terrified shepherds (Luke 2:8-14), angels now came to announce the resurrection—bookends to Luke's Gospel.

Once the women heard the angels' reminder, Jesus' teachings came back to them—they remembered his words. Ironically, while Jesus' closest followers had forgotten His words, His enemies had not. In his Gospel, Matthew noted that the religious leaders who had pushed for Jesus' crucifixion told Pilate about His claims of a resurrection after three days (Matt. 27:62-66). That's why the heavy stone was put in front of the tomb and Roman soldiers were charged with guarding it. Now that things were starting to make sense, the women were given a mission.

¹ *Life Group Questions*. <https://www.firstmbchurch.org/sites/default/files/LifeGroup%20Questions%204-21-19.pdf>. 21 April 2019.

Matthew recorded that the women were commanded to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection with His disciples (Matt. 28:5-8). Luke also noted that they reported what they had seen to the disciples. It is worth noting that these first witnesses were an unlikely group. In the first century, women held no real social standing outside of their families. They had no power and no prestige. Yet, because they came to the tomb, they were given the privilege of being the first to learn of Jesus' resurrection and to tell others about it.²

The reference to the women at the beginning of the story (24:1) and the list of some of their names at the end (24:10) frames the account. The sight – or, more appropriately, the vision – takes us into a realm of awe and wonder, for suddenly two men appear as the women are engaged in their traditional task of caring for the body of a loved one who has died. Cleopas and his companion will later identify the two men as “angels” (24:23), but in the story of the empty tomb they are not given that label. In fact, they do not even get an angel's task, which is to provide new information to their human audience. The role of these two is to ask a question, and to remind the women of what Jesus has already told them (24:5-7).

The place of memory is crucial to Luke's interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus. In the first place, since the women indeed “remember” (24:8), Luke obviously intends to present them as part of the inner circle of disciples with whom such information was shared.³

“These words seemed to them to be nonsense, and they didn't believe them” (v. 11). Part of the problem is that the women's tale is incredible—everyone knows that death is final. Another part of the problem is related to the fact that these witnesses to the open tomb are women. Jewish law requires male witnesses, and men in a patriarchal society are not much inclined to take the testimony of women seriously.

When Jesus predicted his own death, the disciples didn't understand what he was saying, because it was hidden from them (9:45; 18:34). Since they didn't understand Jesus—and since the idea of Jesus dying soon was so foreign to their thinking—Jesus' predictions of his death seem to have “gone in one ear and out the other.” However, these troubling words did make an impression—enough so that the disciples could recall them after seeing God's plan come to full fruition.⁴

Verses 13-35

The account of the journey to Emmaus is as unique as it is ironic. Appearing only in the gospel of Luke, the story opens as an imprecisely identified “two of them” journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The exact location of Emmaus is unknown today.

² *Raised! Salvation comes through Jesus' death and resurrection.* Lifeway Christian Resources. <http://walnutridgechurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Personal-Study-Guide-7.pdf>. 2019.

³ Ringe, Sharon H. *Westminster Bible Companion: Luke*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY. 1995.

⁴ Donovan, Richard Neill. *Sermon Writer: Luke 24:1-12*. <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/luke-241-12/>. 2015.

For Luke, who has been concerned with the centrality of Jerusalem throughout his gospel (e.g. 9:51, 53; 13:33-34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11), the movement toward Emmaus is probably not as significant as the movement *from* Jerusalem. In other words, Luke presents the picture of two disciples who are leaving the gospel's center stage to travel to its periphery, even if for a short time. The introduction of Jesus in verse 15 inaugurates the irony that will permeate this account. The reader is told that the newcomer is Jesus, but verse 16 specifies that the disciples are not privy to this information. The passive construction here ("were kept from recognizing") may be a divine passive intended to imply that God is responsible for their initial ignorance. Though the picture of a deity who withholds knowledge may at first seem disturbing, it is, nonetheless, a biblical image that has precedent in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10) and the intentional confounding of Isaiah's audience (Isaiah 6:9-10). In any case, given that the disciples will not remain in their ignorance for long (cf. v. 31), even if divine agency is the cause of their initial blindness, it hardly presents the most troubling picture of God in all of biblical literature.

Following Jesus' query about their discussion in verse 17, Cleopas continues the story's irony by asking Jesus, the one character who would have first-hand knowledge of what had just happened in Jerusalem, if he is the only one who remains unaware of these events. The following exchange between Jesus and Cleopas continues the irony as Cleopas' explanation in verses 20-21 suggests that he is under the impression that, due to Jesus' death, Jesus was not the one for whom they had hoped. The hope that Jesus is the one to redeem Israel (v. 21) was introduced early on in the gospel as Zechariah praised God for the redemption of Israel (1:68), and as the prophetess Anna proclaims Jesus to those who are searching for similar redemption (2:38).

The irony of the situation here in Cleopas' speech is that, in fact, it was precisely through Jesus' death that he was revealed to be the one who was hoped for all along. This point becomes all the more clear as Jesus rebukes Cleopas for his ignorance (v. 25), and explains that the Messiah's suffering is necessary for his glory (v. 26). This sentiment, too, is dripping with irony, insofar as no one would ever expect that suffering and glory should be so closely intertwined. The conversation is brought to a close in much the same way as it opened. Just as a summary statement opened the dialogue (vv. 13-16) so, too, does a summary statement close it (v. 27).

Verse 28 finds the travelers having arrived at their destination. Jesus' seemingly odd intent to go on (v. 28) may be explainable on the basis of ancient Middle Eastern hospitality practices. Proper etiquette dictated that a guest should refuse service or hospitality from a host several times. Only after the host had repeatedly insisted on the invitation was the guest expected to accept. Thus, it could be that verse 28 implies an initial rejection of an unstated invitation that is only accepted finally in verse 29.

The narration in verses 30-31 serves to offer the reader of the story a similar experience as the characters within it. There is no recorded speech of Jesus in these verses, and so the reader is privy only to his actions which have the effect of making him known to the disciples. Here in verse 31, a passive verb indicates the disciples' access to insight ("their eyes were opened").

This could simply be an expression, or it may again, as in verse 16 previously, be meant as a divine passive. The return trip to Jerusalem in verse 33 brings the disciples back to the central location of Luke's gospel. Just as Luke described Jesus as setting his face to go to Jerusalem (9:51) in order that the significant events of Jesus' crucifixion and death could be carried out in that significant geographic locale, so, too, does Luke now describe the disciples as returning to this central location in order that they might begin the spreading of the good news from there, a process that will be described in depth in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

As a whole, this passage is chock full of irony. The audience is granted insight that its characters only gradually obtain, and the knowledge about the significance of Jesus' death is itself ironic. It is only through suffering that the Messiah is able to achieve glory (v. 26). If the pericope's characters are confused, then it only mirrors a similar confusion that may be experienced by the story's audience who must also come to grips with the backwards logic that this idea implies.⁵

Read Luke 24:1-35

Initial Reactions

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this passage tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

Going Deeper

1. The angels' asked why the women at the tomb sought the living among the dead. How do we seek "the living amongs the dead" in our lives? What are some of those things that you seek life from, satisfaction from, fulfillment from that are dead?
2. Does the story of the road to Emmaus have something to teach about the distinction between talking about Jesus and communion with Jesus?
3. What do you think it means that their hearts "burned within them" when Jesus opened the Scriptures to them (verse 32)? Have you ever experienced this as you engaged the Scriptures?
4. Here are a few passages in the Gospels that show how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament story. Pick one pairing. Read it and see if you can make the connection for how Jesus fulfills that passage/story.
 - a. John 1:1-14 (OT connection = Gen. 1)
 - b. John 6:25-31 (OT connection = Ex. 16)
 - c. John 10:11-18 (OT connection = Ps. 23)

⁵ *Sitting in the Gap Study Guide*. <https://www.bwco.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sitting-in-the-Gap-Study-Guide-05.12.2019.pdf>. 12 May 2019.

5. Look at verses 24:28-31. When do the men know this man is Jesus? Why is his action significant (where have we seen Him break bread before)? How does this account speak to the sovereignty of God? How did the men react to this r

So What Questions

6. One of the greatest evidences of the resurrection is a life changed by its message. How has the resurrection changed your life? Thinking through your own life walking with the Lord, what have been some of the costs of following Him? What have been some of the greatest rewards?
7. The disciples were surprised by Jesus showing up on the road with them. When have you recently been surprised by God in moment or season of disappointment? What happened? How did it impact the way that you related to God?
8. Just like on the road to Emmaus, Jesus is present with us even when we don't realize it. How have you found that to be true in your life? Are you in a season right now where it's hard to recognize Christ's presence?
9. If you were to identify the top three reasons why it can be hard for people to believe what Jesus says, what top three reasons would you give? If an someone who is skeptical of the faith asked you what practical difference does Jesus make in your life? What would you tell them?

Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.