

**The Roads to Belief**  
**Luke 24:33-43**  
**May 26, 2019 – Sixth Sunday of Easter**

Today's scripture picks up where last weeks left off. You may remember the Cleopas and the other disciple met Jesus on the Road to Emmaus; but they did not recognize him. They did not know it was Jesus until he sat at the table with them, took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. Suddenly their eyes were opened. They recognized Jesus, and all that had happened earlier made sense.

So today's lesson tells us that they got up in that same hour. The Common English Bible says, "They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem." Here, the Gospel emphasizes the immediacy, even the urgency of the situation. This news would not wait until morning. We've got to go now to share the good news of the resurrection. They found the eleven and their companions, and they told them: "All that we've been hearing is true. The Lord really has risen. We saw him with our own eyes. We broke bread with him. We experienced him."

Now apparently Jesus was "tagging along behind" them, for the scripture tells that, "While they were talking, Jesus himself stood among them and said "Peace be with you." They thought they were seeking a ghost, and they were terrified. At this point our lesson has shades of that "doubting Thomas" story we heard a couple weeks ago. Jesus says to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." But these disciples seem to be even greater doubters than Thomas; because, we're told that while they experienced great joy, they were still questioning, still wondering – how could this be? So Jesus requested something to eat. They gave him a piece of baked fish; and he ate it in front of them. The point is: Ghosts don't eat.

And so I ask again the words that I asked our 8:00 congregation on Easter, words that I regularly ask classes when I teach biblical studies: "So what?" "So what does this all mean for us 20 centuries later?"

I submit that the "so what" of this lesson, is the firm belief that Christ did indeed rise from the dead. And, while we will celebrate the ascension next week, I tell you the spirit of the living Christ continues to be with us, at all times in all places, no exceptions. Do you believe it? Do you live it?

Some of you may know the name Blaise Pascal. If you can remember all the way back to high school algebra, you might remember something called Pascal's Triangle. Pascal's Triangle predicts the mathematical coefficients of binomial powers; and, if you don't understand what I just said, don't worry about it. It's that

“heady” math “stuff.” Blaise Pascal was a seventeenth century mathematician, physicist, and inventor. Perhaps lesser known – Pascal was also a theologian. Maybe it’s something about the mathematical mind. Both Newton and Leibniz, the two people responsible for developing the calculus, turned to theology later in life. But back to Pascal. Pascal stated that there are three roads to belief: reason, habit, and revelation. Friends, when speaking about your faith in God and in the resurrected Christ, I hope you’re following all three roads.

Reason: I once had a member of my former congregation, a physician who was theologically fairly conservative, ask me if I believed in creationism or evolution. I answered “Yes!” I stated, “Yes, I believe in both. No, I don’t believe that, when Genesis states that the world was created in six days, they are talking about 24 hour periods. No, I don’t believe that the entire universe as we know it was created in 144 hours, in 4004 BC. Yes I do believe that dinosaurs once roamed the earth. Yes I do believe that humans evolved from lower forms of life. Yes, I do believe in Darwin’s laws of natural selection. It all makes reasonable sense; and it’s the only thing that makes reasonable sense. And still, I said, who do you think created the laws of physics and biology and evolution which guide our universe? Who created the order in which we live? Who oversaw the entire evolutionary process. That’s God; and that’s creation. So, yes, I believe that God created: and yes, I believe that God is continuing to create. Yes, I believe we were created by God; and, I believe we were created to help co-create – to move creation forward. That’s part of what it means to be “created in the image of God.” And I also believe that evolution is one of the amazing tools that God uses in the creation process. So yes, I believe in both creationism and evolution; and I draw my faith through that reasoning.

Revelation: I just stated that reason has led me to what I might call a scientific, orderly, concept of the Holy, but I also believe in the Holy Spirit. Things happen that we cannot understand. The disciples could not understand that Jesus was once dead, and now is alive, walking with them, talking to them, eating with them. This simply did not make reasonable sense. This is revelation. People sometimes ask me if I believe in miracles. The short answer is “Yes.” I have seen miraculous cures. I have seen life’s events take sudden turns for the better. I have seen prayers answered. And, perhaps, on a lesser scale, I’ve seen something pop-up at just the right time, when it was most needed; and I attribute all of this to the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Spirit has power far beyond the physical; powers we do not fully understand. I’m not sure, when miracles seem to happen contrary to reason, if they really contradict reason, or if we simply do not have enough knowledge to completely understand our universe. I do know that there are a lot of things we simply do not understand. I also know we will never have the complete, total knowledge that exists only in the “mind,” (and I put the

word “mind” in quotation marks), total knowledge exists only in the “mind” of God. We may have been created to co-create; but we are still creatures, not the creator. Revelation happens. It happens every day of our lives. We simply need to be open to those wonderful interruptions of the Spirit into our lives.

And this brings me to the last road to belief – Habit. When I first read Pascal’s statement, I thought, “Well I hope folks aren’t believing simply out of habit.” But then, on further reflection, I took the opposite view, “I hope our belief in the risen Christ, I hope our understanding that the risen Christ is always with us, truly does become a habit.” I hope that belief becomes so much a part of us that it is automatic. I hope our response to God and our relationship to people, all people is guided by the habit that Christ is with us, always with us. In our secular world, will that habit need occasional reinforcing – of course it will; and that’s where the reason and the revelation come in. I might add, that’s also where the church comes in.

Christ is risen; and the Spirit of the risen Christ walks with us, every minute of every day of our lives. Do you believe it? Why do you believe it? I propose we all believe it because we all have three roads to belief: reason, revelation, and habit. And, at various times and places we find ourselves on different roads. Sometimes we may even find ourselves simultaneously on multiple roads. I give thanks to God for the roads to belief that we may never forget that Christ is with us always.

Let us pray. . .

Most Holy Lord,

We thank you for your presence with us;  
and we thank you for your roads to belief,  
that we may never forget that you are with us always.

May we always live out of that presence,  
that all we do may be for the furtherance of your kingdom upon this earth.  
Amen.

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