

Luke 24:13-49

The Walk to Emmaus

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[f] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.^[g] ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹ He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[h] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[i] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” ²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[j] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us^[k] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”^[l] ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.^[m] ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah^[n] is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses^[o] of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

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Luke 24:13-49

Open Eyes, Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors

Kerra Becker English

Once a tomb is closed, it isn't meant to be reopened.

When the women went to the tomb, the very last thing they expected to see was an empty grave. They saw his crucifixion. Jesus was dead. Their friend was gone. Their hope for seeing him alive again had more to do with the last days, a reckoning that wouldn't take place until the end of time.

Who goes around opening graves? Our burial system may be different from biblical times, but it's not unlike walking away from that casket over top of a hole in the ground when the graveside service is complete. You walk away from the cemetery grounds-keepers and next time you go to see the place where your loved one lies, there is an overwhelming finality to seeing a too familiar name inscribed on that headstone. Vaulted. Closed. Buried.

Tombs stay closed. Except for this one. This one opens. God opens it to us. God opens it for us. The women see and are amazed, perplexed, and terrified. In Luke's version of this story, they are reminded by two men in dazzling clothes of all the things that Jesus had taught them previously about this moment, and then they open to the possibility that Jesus had known about this and considered it part of the larger plan all along. The open tomb opens them to a new reality, so they go and tell the others. But when they tell the disciples their highly unbelievable story, they immediately think it is MESSED UP. The "idle tales of women" as Luke indelicately describes the reaction out of the mouths of the disciples. Peter, that cowardly rock, goes to check it out and confirm their story for himself. And he sees what they saw. The tomb is open. The linens empty. Jesus is gone.

So, who goes around opening graves? God opens graves. The Holy Spirit does this holy work of lifting us out of valley of the shadow of death and into new life. It's not just the Jesus story, it is meant to become our story. It is the eternal narrative of hope and possibility. The open tomb – a sign and symbol that even though death has a painful sting, it is not the final word. Even at the grave, we say, Alleluia is the final word.

Once eyes are closed, they cannot see what's right in front of them.

From the open tomb, we stroll with a couple of Jesus' followers to the town of Emmaus. In this story, the resurrected Jesus shows up, but they cannot see who he is. They don't recognize him. He isn't who they thought he would be as the redeemer of Israel. Their tears have clouded their perception. I can't say that I find their lack of recognition implausible though. They weren't expecting their dead friend to reappear, let alone meet them for a walk on their way to get the heck out of Jerusalem.

Our eyes can become just as dim. Whenever we dismiss our own situation as hopeless and redemption impossible... Whenever we hear the news from Jerusalem, or Washington D.C., or any other seat of political and economic power and feel defeated... our eyes begin to close to the possibility that God is making all things new. Our ability to see through the pain and injustice and frustration to a new day dawning diminishes. Then we only bear witness to the execution, and the resurrection seems to us a fanciful tale of visions and angels that only the blind or stupid might believe.

To open our eyes and recognize the resurrected Christ is a risk, and a big one at that. It challenges all our notions about how the world works. The powerful have always stood on the necks of the powerless. Accusation, trial, and punishment is the more likely story for those who live their lives

out on the margins. What makes us think that God is doing something to change that dynamic when it still seems so prevalent? What gives us reason to believe that the Emmaus story is any truer than the news from Jerusalem? With our eyes open, wide open, to the full experience of the pain in this world, only then might we be able to also experience the wonder and the joy, and the gift that life truly is. But open eyes will not shield us from seeing things we'd rather not see. Only closed eyes will do that. And yet, not seeing can be worse than seeing. The downturned eyes of the oppressed will sink further into depression and the blind eyes of the oppressors will continue to recklessly demolish both people and our planet. But Jesus lifts the eyes of the downtrodden, and invites those with power to open their eyes and see. Opening our eyes to the resurrected Christ, the one who brings to life and fulfillment the prophecies of old is what gives us the ability to work for change, to satisfy the hungry, to release the captives, and to set the prisoners free.

Once the guest list is closed, there may not be room at the table for Jesus.

How do they recognize Jesus in this story? They offer hospitality to a stranger, and find out it is Jesus who is breaking bread with them. The open table always has room for one more. God's guest list is never completely full. How many banquet stories, and picnic on a mountain stories, and table stories does Jesus have to tell? How many catches of fish, and loaves of bread, and jars of wine will it take before we get it?

For those who follow Jesus, hospitality is not optional, it's exactly where we will find him. We find Jesus when we receive the stranger, welcome the immigrant, visit the prisoner, and house the refugee. Remember, the despised Samaritan is the hero of Jesus' almost universally known parable. It's certainly bad news in that story for the "righteous ones" who closed off and passed by the wounded man in the ditch on the side of the road. That last seat held open at the Passover Seder,

the open one meant for Elijah, could very well be meant for Jesus who always seems to come as the very last, very least guest of the party.

Once a heart is closed, it is painful break it open, even with love.

So, is it any wonder their hearts were described as burning inside when they realized that Christ was with them in that very room? Another word for openness is vulnerability, and that word scares us a lot. It is a burning feeling to know that we are susceptible to being wounded by other people. Many of us would rather close off our hearts than be hurt by keeping them open. In the research of sociologist and author Brene Brown, she discovered that vulnerability, having an open heart, is exactly what enabled people to live whole-hearted lives, lives infused with joy, and meaning, and acceptance.

A life of faith is an open-hearted life. Trusting in others may lead to heartache. Allowing ourselves to love may mean that we will know the pain of love lost. Beloved people and pets will leave us, shattering our hearts into a million pieces. But I think I'd rather have a patched-up heart than an impenetrable one. Jesus invites us to open our hearts to him by opening our hearts to our friends, our neighbors, and even our enemies. The greatest gift of all, he says, is to be willing to lay down your life for your friends – which he did – and those same friends were the ones who fell asleep and couldn't even pray with him for one hour. Jesus lived in the most open-hearted way possible, and I am convinced that the courage that life takes is exactly what struck fear into the closed hearts of the religious establishment of the time.

Once a mind is closed, the living Word dies, and scripture calcifies into dead doctrines.

Both along the road and in the room with the disciples, Jesus opens their minds to scripture. He explains how the stories they have read and the truth they have learned about God applies to him. He also opened their minds to receive the good news of God's great love. We understand our faith best with open minds that allow us to receive not only the old stories, but the new information to help us interpret those stories. Jesus himself allows them to wonder, and question, and take in new information. He wants their faith to breathe with life, not harden into a set of rigid rules.

Closed. It's no way to follow Jesus – the one who keeps opening, and opening, and opening.

Jesus isn't about closing eyes and hearts and minds – no matter what you've heard to the contrary. Luke reminds us that at the center of the good news there is always another opening.

Open tomb. Open eyes. Open table. Open heart. Open mind.

Knock and the door will open. Seek and you will find.

Open your heart to Christ. Open your mind to Christ.

And then you will open your table and open your church community to all who need to hear this incredibly good news. Amen.

Charge to Amanda

Why do angels always say, “Do not be afraid?”

Well, they say that because seeing an angel means that you are in the presence of holiness.

They say that because they are likely about to ask you to do something or believe something that will blow your mind and take an amazing amount of courage.

So if we turn that phrase into a positive command – the angel might say to you – “Be brave.”

Be brave, Amanda, You have been called by God to a life of ministry, and in that life of ministry you will have those moments where you will find yourself in the presence of holiness.

It will amaze you. It will warm your heart and fill you with joy. And it will be scary.

Glennon Doyle Melton talks a lot about bravery in her writing.

She is a brave Momma. She is an outspoken Christian who acknowledges the brokenness of her past (and the ongoing redemption required for the present). And through times of not being true to herself, she learned about the bravery that is required just to be exactly who you are.

In a public letter she writes on her blog to her timid daughter Tish, she reminds her that being brave isn’t what we usually think it means – something like “Be afraid, but do whatever it is anyway.” She says, “Brave means listening to the still small voice inside and DOING AS IT SAYS.” Be that kind of brave.

But there’s a second gift in ministry that must lay alongside the need for courage.

It is kindness. Be kind, Amanda.

You are a kind and generous person. We have learned that about you in just your short time here.

You listen. You reflect. You go where the needs are.

Our world needs pastors and spiritual leaders who are infused with kindness.

You’d think that would be a requirement – but as you and I well know – not all those who call themselves clergy can pull it off.

And it's harder than you think sometimes. Sometimes your kindness will be tested.

Be kind anyway.

But being kind doesn't mean having squishy boundaries.

Sometimes we women have been conditioned to believe that being kind means letting people walk all over us. That isn't biblical kindness, and it's not real kindness.

Being kind can also mean setting boundaries to keep another person safe, or holding others accountable, or taking the time to be kind to yourself so that you have the energy to be in such a people oriented profession. In difficult situations, both in the hospital setting, and when you have a pastoral role in a church, people will be looking to you as a representative of the kindness and graciousness of God. To the best of your ability - show them all that grace can mean.

So I will share with you a charge – again from Glennon – that is good for all of us to hear over and over again:

Amanda, Be brave because you are a child of God,

Be kind because everyone else is too.