



YEAR 1—The God of Life: A Story of God's Redeeming Shalom

Module 4—Coming Alive by Being Human: Jesus Stories on What it Means to Be Human and Fully Alive

Lesson 6—Luke 24:13–35

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

This story has always fascinated me. I've wondered how the disciples, who had walked with Jesus for three years, would not recognize their friend and fellow traveler. Was it simply that they didn't expect to see him, because he was, after all, supposed to be dead? Or, was there something so completely different about his resurrected appearance that they truly didn't recognize him? I've been amazed at the way Jesus led them through the storyline of Scripture, pointing out story after story that referred to himself. How incredible it must have been to have stories you've known since childhood become vibrantly fresh and real! I've marveled at the way Jesus took bread, as he had right before he was arrested and sentenced to death on the cross, blessed and broke it, and then handed it to the disciples he had met on the road. In that moment, they knew this was Jesus. And then, he's gone again. Let your imagination run with this story and it really is an astonishing episode. Yet, how are we to hear it not simply as something that happened back then and there, but as an ongoing episode of God's story in bringing us back into the fullness of life in Jesus Christ?

The hopelessness in which the disciples find themselves is not foreign to God's people. All throughout the Old Testament God's people found themselves wandering and lost. In those moments, God drew near to them, reviving their spirits and ushering them back into life. God, in the resurrected Jesus Christ and the appearance here to his disciples, continues to draw near in times of lostness. Only now, God draws near in order to redirect their sorrow and despair into the fabric of his life-giving mission for the world. This is not a moment for hopelessness and returning to an old way of life. The resurrection is the climax of God's mission, the moment when God in Jesus Christ has definitively overcome death, ushering in new life for God's creation. God not only intends to lift the spirits of these forlorn travelers, but by his nearness to them in Jesus Christ, intends to draw them into the story that he has been telling from the beginning of time, situating them to move forward as part of his mission to bring about the restoration of life for the world.

In order to do this, God opens their eyes. They need a new set of lenses in order to see the work of God in the crucifixion of Jesus. Meant to forestall the plan of God to bring wholeness and life from brokenness and death, the crucifixion was actually the very moment when God was doing just that. In retelling the story of God's plan for life from Moses down through the prophets, and connecting it to himself, Jesus is awakening the disciples to join him once again. He is issuing a call for them to see him at work in the world in ways they previously could not have, and now truly give all of themselves to this mission. The presence of Jesus is what ultimately transforms their eyes. In breaking bread and blessing it, Jesus reminds them of his presence at the Passover Meal, right before his arrest and crucifixion. The meal that Jesus shares with them can be compared to the meal that we share in communion, and through that practice, experience the presence of Jesus in a real, even if symbolic way. The fact that this act opens their eyes to God's work in Jesus' life, death and resurrection reminds us that our only hope for truly learning to see God at work in the world is to view life through the presence of Jesus.

OUR STORY

If this is a story that is not simply to remain an episode of history, it must become our story. What are we to gather about how Jesus is calling us more deeply into life with him through this story? Jesus is still present to us today by his spirit and so we can and need to read this as our story. When we find ourselves in a similar place as these disciples—and at some point in our journey with Jesus we surely will—feeling like all has been lost, intent on simply making our way someplace else, this story becomes vibrantly real.

Our lives sometimes become so crowded with other things that we find ourselves preoccupied just as these disciples were. Like them, we don't notice or even recognize that Jesus comes up and walks with us. He wants in on our lives, so he questions what it is that is concerning us at the moment. In short, Jesus comes to us precisely where we are at. Jesus doesn't force his way into our lives. He simply joins our walk, making his presence known even if we aren't really cognizant of who he is at the time. But his presence in our lives is transformative. It begins to change the way we are engaging our current circumstances.

This transformation happens in our lives when Jesus draws us into his story. When Jesus we see how our lives fit into Jesus' mission, what it was that preoccupied us begins to fade away and we find ourselves caught up in the story that Jesus is telling. We discover that the story we are hearing is the same one that God has been telling from long ago. It is a story in which God is bringing life out of death, restoring the hopes of the hopeless and calling together a people to be the bearers of his life-giving mission in the world. Slowly our concerns begin to fade as we are enraptured by the story being told.

Then at some point, Jesus makes his presence known. He shares communion with us through his Spirit, drawing us out of sorrow and despair and into new life with him. At this point we realize we cannot keep this story to ourselves, but must go and tell others. The presence of Jesus lingers with us, and we feel sent to live into God's mission by alerting others that Jesus is alive and we know him. We are brought to life by his presence, and compelled to go to others in that same presence. This is our story because Jesus continues to work in this way. He comes near to us, draws us into his story of life, and sends us out to be a part of the on-going ministry of his presence in the world.

OTHERS' STORY

This is exactly how this becomes others' story as well. This story is a missional story, and Jesus gives hope to his followers, and a new understanding of his mission in the world from this point forward. They, along with others, had always assumed that Jesus as the Messiah would redeem Israel and bring them into the fullness of life by leading them out of oppression. Instead, as had been foretold countless times before, God was at work in Christ bringing life from their suffering and death. Because of this, we are now sent as God's people to bear witness to life in the midst of others' suffering.

To be drawn into this story is to also be drawn into what happened before it on the cross. The cross was the moment when God was at work restoring life for the world, taking our sin and death up into himself in Jesus Christ in order that we might be saved. Jesus' followers, therefore, are not called to avoid suffering but to willingly enter into, for the sake of others. This is why the image of communion that occurs in this passage is so crucial.

Communion is a practice of the church that reminds us that the life we have in Christ was brought about by the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood. When God raised Jesus from the dead that was his vindication of Jesus' faithfulness to God's plan to bring about life for the world through the cross. The practice of communion is a reminder that we are likewise sustained by God's Spirit as we suffer with and for others, and in so doing bear witness that Jesus has overcome death for us. The church is sent into the world to stand in solidarity with those who suffer. In other words, the Emmaus Road that is filled with disillusionment and dashed hopes is to be a well-worn road by those of us who would follow Jesus. On this road we discover the presence of Jesus as we suffer with and for others, inviting them to hear Jesus' perspective on their own sorrow and despair through our faithful presence with them.

This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. We discover the fullness of life not by avoiding the suffering of others, but by entering it with them. We know that we too may suffer when we stand in solidarity with the downcast and heart-broken, but we also know that Jesus' presence goes with us through his Spirit. We trust that just as God brought Jesus out of the grave, he is still at work bringing forth life from their place of death. Our greatest gift is to share in the presence of Jesus as God brings about restoration even here.

THE WORLD'S STORY

In this story Jesus has overcome death, and through that God is remaking the entire world. When so many empires and nations of our world use the threat of death to maintain their rule and authority, for Jesus to claim victory over death through the cross and resurrection breaks open the world to new possibilities for life. Death which has held the world in bondage for so long no longer has the same hold. Jesus has dismantled its power. Sin, which draws humanity away from life, and pushes us to consort with death by destroying God's creation, has been overcome. The story Jesus is telling, and the one of which he is the interpretive key, explodes open the world as we know it and ushers in God's new world teeming once again with the possibility of life.