



December 1-2, 2018
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Your Welcome: Your Radar

Luke 24:28-35

We are concluding a series on hospitality called "Your Welcome," where we've been taking an honest look at how we who call Chapel Hill home have been extending our welcome to others especially during our weekend services. If you're visiting with us today, I want to extend my own welcome to you! And I half-apologize if our over-excited secret greeters are extra-enthusiastic in finding you. Just know we are on a learning curve. We are recognizing that this time we spend together is not only our time to connect with God for ourselves and to see our friends but also to help *you* connect with God and find your own community here at Chapel Hill. And I sincerely hope you do connect with God and a new community.

I hope you'll keep coming especially through this Christmas season. We're excited to be starting a series that centers around the writer John's Christmas story, a story that begins with the promise of light shining in the darkness. We'll let our favorite Christmas movies illustrate what John is saying about God coming to earth in the person of Jesus, so we'll have fun! My favorite is the first up. Who can fill in the rest of this phrase, "The best way to spread Christmas cheer....?" [is singing loud for all to hear.] Yes! So that will be fun, next week!

This week we're looking at a text that I got to hand-pick because it is one of the Bible's most *wonder-ful* stories as in, inspires tremendous wonder, in me. It's a story that begins mid-morning three days after Jesus died on the cross. There were two of Jesus' friends that day, walking from the big city of Jerusalem back to, presumably their home, in the village of Emmaus. Let me pick up in Luke 24:14 and read the story to you. We're in Luke 24, verse 14.

They were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Let's stop right there for a second. I want you to think about the last time you were emotional in public, happy or sad. You're talking with a friend. The emotion's building. You know that moment? Now someone else walks up. What do you do? Try not to make eye contact? Hope they'll go away? I've done that. I've also just slapped on a fake smile and tried to act like everything was normal and start a simple introduction. Oh, hi, Art! So good to see you, let me introduce to you...you know how that goes.

I can't remember a time when someone—a stranger, no less—has walked up, and I've let them see that I was sad. But the first piece of this story that even opens up the possibility for hospitality is that these two friends were open to a stranger joining their conversation.

A couple of weeks ago I was with my mom at the Apple store in Tacoma. I'd been trying to explain to my parents over the last week how God has really seemed to be opening up conversations all over the place with people who don't yet know God or people who have walked away from the church but seem very open to talking to me. It's been extraordinary, really. I've had to take notes to keep up with all the people's names and what we've talked about. These aren't people who walk into a church looking for a pastor. They're the people next to me having lunch, the woman I walk past at the playground, the mom in the doctor's waiting room. It's incredible. I had hoped my parents would want to go spend time with me in Port Orchard so they

could see what God is up to particularly there. But, as you can imagine, my life is kind of overwhelming to them, so we'd been sticking close to home.

Well then I take off a day from work to just spend some quality time with mom shopping in Tacoma. And we're at the Apple store getting my phone fixed. The girl next to me looks really frustrated. She gets news that her phone isn't really reparable, and it's going to be crazy expensive. The tech guy walks away and you can see, she's on the edge of tears. Now I just get this tiny nudge internally, "Say something." Do you know that voice? I have come to learn that the voice in my head that sounds a lot like me but says things I wouldn't think of, that tends to be the Holy Spirit. Again the nudge, "Go ahead." So I reach over, putting my hand near her on the table, and I say, "It's going to be okay." She looked up, startled, a stranger is talking to her? I could feel the awkwardness and didn't say more.

The tech guy comes back to her. It's for sure. It's not going to work for her. Meanwhile, I had texted Larry, "How much had you hoped to sell my phone for?" So now I go back to her, "Would you like to buy my phone?" Now it's a conversation back-and-forth. I'm finding out about a recent car accident, a legal battle, hard jobs. I just ask, "Would you mind if I prayed for you?" "Right now?" she asked. "Yep." "Um, okay." I pray for her. Simple. Short. I look up. She's red in the face and very tearful. We exchange numbers and info, as she has now bought my phone. We've been in text contact since.

Then Mom and I go to buy a new case for my phone. The girl there clearly has a Spanish accent. I start speaking to her in Spanish. We chat a while. Turns out, she's from Ensanada, where we do our Mexico mission trip every year! I get to go with the youth for my first time this year. So I mention Agua Viva, our mission partner there—and she knows it! Her boyfriend, Alejandro, went there for summer camp his entire childhood. He works a few booths down, so mom and I go and meet him and reminisce about Agua Viva. He's not interested in church these days, but his mom goes to a great Spanish congregation in Tacoma.

As we walk away, my mom says, "I see." When you're open to God interrupting you, and you *expect* that he has people for you to meet in a given day, and you listen to those tiny nudges from the Holy Spirit and act on them, those nudges become more frequent, and those open conversations become more open and more meaningful. Have your radar up for who God has put around you, open up a conversation and just wait to see what else God opens up.

That's what happens for these two, despondent disciples of Jesus. They're willing to open up their conversation, deep in their own sadness, to a stranger, and God opens up so much more for them.

Let me summarize where their conversation goes next. Jesus asks, "What's up?" And they're said and say, "You don't know?" And Jesus says, "What's there to know?" And they answer with all their sad, disappointed perceptions of who Jesus is and what has happened. Some of you might resonate with these because some of you who wouldn't say Jesus is God and yet would say some of these same things about Jesus. They say to this stranger, "Don't you know about Jesus? He's from Nazareth. He's a prophet. He's done and said a lot of incredible things. He was killed on a cross." And here's the heartbreaking line in verse 21, "But we had hoped he that he was the one to redeem Israel. And besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened."

To a Jewish person, it being the third day meant Jesus was really dead. And along with Jesus being dead, so was all their hopes that Jesus would be more than *just* an amazing teacher and prophet. They had hoped Jesus would rise to power and overthrow the Romans and sit on an actual, governmental throne in Jerusalem and make the Israelites the most powerful nation on earth. They had hoped...

Maybe some of you had hoped things from Jesus, too. Had hoped he would save a lost child; that he would heal a friend; that he would bring a stop to a powerful addiction in your own mind. And so far, it seems like these disciples, that it's been too long. That hope is dead.

Here's what I love about these two, they let this stranger in on that disappointment. They open up the conversation while they are still sad. That's a really hard thing to do. Two close friends opened up that conversation with me this week, and it is an incredible privilege to hear those disappointments. To stand with them as they say, "I had hoped..." Jesus lets his friends here pour out their hearts about their disappointment *in him*. And he lets us, too.

If you're in that raw place, it might be hard right now to hear what Jesus says in response to their disappointment, but I think it might prove helpful if you can just stick with me. Or maybe it will be helpful in the future even if it's hard to hear right now, so let me just paraphrase again, the response of Jesus that begins in verse 25.

Jesus said to them. "Oh, you obtuse, close-minded ones, and slow in your attitude about how I do things, slow to conform your disposition, your instincts about how I operate, slow to believe all that the Bible says! Was it not necessary that the Christ should **suffer** these things and enter his glory?" You can't understand because you won't embrace my way of suffering.

Remember—the disciples were disappointed that Jesus had died when they had thought he would be militarily victorious over Rome. And Jesus says, how could you have missed that suffering would be the way to victory? And then Jesus goes on to show them all through the Old Testament how everything that's ever been written about God's Kingdom and his way in the world is that – spoiler alert!—God wins! And he gains victory through suffering. God's victory comes through suffering. Goodness, this is such a hard message. I can see why the disciples were slow of heart to believe this! I am, too! I don't want to think that suffering is the way to victory. And yet that's the grand story that we are a part of. To be a follower of the Most High King is to believe that our suffering has meaning, even purpose, and that on the other end of suffering is eternal victory and reward.

Jesus has made a way so that on the other side of death and disease is resurrection. On the other side of releasing stress and anger is patient endurance. On the other side of relational pain is peace. It doesn't make sense, I know. But it's the way of Jesus! It always has been. And his death reminds us of that. He died on a cross, brutally. And that was the end of sin and death and opened the way for us to know freedom and resurrection. Are we also, slow of heart to believe the role that suffering has in order to bring us into glory?

That's the lesson Jesus had for his sad disciples. You're disappointed. I get it. But don't you understand that this suffering was the necessary way to true victory?

That could have been the end of the story. It could have just been an open conversation that led to a really beautiful lesson on the purpose of suffering. EXCEPT for a moment of incredible hospitality.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

They invited Jesus to stay, and they got to be the second group of witnesses to the resurrected Christ. Jena Meyerpeter, who wrote this week's devotional, said to me, "I wonder if Jesus was just waiting to see their Sermon Notes

hearts. Social obligation was that they would ask once for a stranger to stay.” It’s not in our culture to *have* to extend hospitality, but it was then. So Jesus waits until they *urge* him to stay. Jesus tests them, what’s in their heart? Will they just check the box and go no further? Or will they be radical in the ways of hospitality that Jesus, himself, was radical. They urge him to stay. By doing so, they prove that they really are followers of Jesus. So the stranger, the guest, comes into the dinner, and — get this!— role reversal! Jesus suddenly becomes the host. And *he* takes the bread, blesses it, and breaks it.

Here Jesus goes again, taking this role of host to meals *he’s* been invited to, and wonder upon wonders! Suddenly, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Again, I’m quoting Jena in the devotional this week; she says, “Jesus, the newly risen Savior, allowed for an invitation from His creation before going in to reveal his identity.”

Jesus is not a pushy guest. He’s not going to force himself on you. But when you open up conversation with him, let him into your disappointment, and urge God to stay near to you even when you don’t like his way of suffering, whoa, expect Jesus to reveal himself. Expect him to take up the role of the host in your life, to provide for you, and to show him he is the God who is victorious and who loves you.

Jesus can suddenly open someone’s eyes to reveal to them who he is. And — biggest surprise of all—that revelation happens in a completely ordinary place, at a table around a broken loaf of bread. And so Jesus will show up in Apple stores and in your home, too. Open up a conversation, and let Jesus open our eyes.

Only God can open people’s eyes to understand that HE is God, their Savior. Isn’t that a huge relief to those of us who know God and so long for our friends to know him, too? You don’t have to do force people into recognizing Jesus! The pressure’s off! You just open the conversation, and watch God open the eyes of your friends to see Jesus for who he really is, and watch God open their hearts to understand the Scriptures.

Maybe you need to let Jesus see you’re sad and have an honest conversation with him about what you had hoped he would do.

Maybe you need to let others into your conversation so that you can see what God might want to do in your midst. There are strangers among us who need you to make eye contact with them in the narthex, and let them see how you’re *really* doing. Let them hear your honest conversations. They need to hear how people who follow Jesus process even our sadness.

So whether you need to start talking to God or you need to open up your circle to others, I urge you—open up the conversation and see what else Jesus wants to open up. He’ll open your eyes to see Jesus as he really is, he’ll open the Scriptures to understand the way of Jesus. What a wonder what God can do with a simple act of hospitality, an open invitation for God to join you in your everyday moments.

We need you to help us create spaces for open conversations here at Chapel Hill especially this Christmas season. This season particularly has people loaded with hopes and disappointments, and they may just be open to opening up that conversation with God.

So for those of you who call Chapel Hill home, here’s your final hospitality challenge: Sign up to help us with our Christmas weekend services. Let’s create spaces in the parking lot as people are walking in, in our narthex, in our nursery, and in our sanctuary, for people to open that conversation with God and with one another. Will you help us? Help us as if it were your home and you were urging Jesus to come in and stay in it. We have signups up in the Next Steps Center today and on the insert you were given when you walked in. We want to be a place where conversations with God open up, and where we get to see Jesus open people’s eyes to see who he really is, God in the flesh, the one who is alive, our Savior, and the fulfillment of all we long for.