

For me, when I read and study a Scripture passage, it usually helps me appreciate and understand a text more clearly, if I can find and reflect on how it connects with an event of my own life and experience. Sometimes that helps me identify **the point of a Scripture passage**, while at the same time, allowing God's word to illuminate, gives me a much better perspective on my own life. Right out of seminary, I served as a new church development pastor, and by the second year we were growing a bit ahead of schedule. Then late in July that year, an emergency bulletin on the radio indicated that a major hurricane would pass through our area... and I thought, so what's the big deal about a little extra wind and rain? Unconcerned, I continued to plan the worship service and work on my sermon for that week. But then it occurred to me, that when you live right on the coast, a hurricane be a pretty significant concern to some folks, so I set aside my sermon preparation to make a few visits. 1st stop, an older couple was overjoyed and grateful to see me, so we talked about preparing for the storm and prayed together. Others, I helped some put plywood sheets up over their windows, and I made sure everyone was set to get off the barrier island. I got around to most of the church, and was amazed to see the tide rising way up on the beach and waves crashing over the roadway. Finally by late afternoon I made my way back to our house, as the hurricane was really kicking into high gear... which as it turned out was a bit more than just a little wind and rain. **The storm was way more powerful and frightening than I'd expected.** It was the first major hurricane to hit our area in over 40 years, and the damage and destruction left behind was devastating. Early the next morning Kathy and I went out to survey the damage. It was shocking and quite depressing to see our home, and rather than face our own clean-up and repairs, we decided to get out and visit the congregation. Many of the folks had been up all night dealing with storm-damage. They were beyond stressed and exhausted, and several were dealing with huge trees that had fallen into their houses. Others, had significant roof damage, windows & doors blown out, and huge amounts of storm damage & debris scattered everywhere.

The next day our community was declared a national disaster area. Community-wide everybody pitched in, neighbor helped neighbor, and for a month or so we all worked hard to rebuild and restore, and generally our community was back in pretty good shape. Then, just days after Kathy and I finally got our roof repaired, about a month and a half after the first hurricane, a second, even larger and more destructive hurricane followed exactly the same storm-path as the first and crushed through our little community again. Our area was devastated all over again and **our spirits were broken.** We were unprepared to process the loss and disappointment, for a second time, so quickly, was just too discouraging. Church members who had moved to the coast with great hope & optimism were now **numb with overwhelming sadness, defeat and grief**, and several of our church families decided to move away.

In the text, Cleopas and his traveling companion were feeling that sort of heavy sadness, defeat and grief along their journey, traveling home on the road to Emmaus. Just a week earlier, they were probably part of the Palm Sunday procession, celebrating the triumphant entry of Jesus into the city amid all those shouts of joy, anticipating victory. They certainly would have noticed the growing conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities that week, **but nothing could have prepared them for the sudden and awful events of Friday. Finally, after the Sabbath they could travel home to Emmaus... to get away so that they could think and process it all, and go someplace where maybe the pain wasn't so raw.** They had hoped and believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would defeat and end the hated Roman occupation... they were already and waiting for the promised Kingdom of God. But their savior had been betrayed, scourged and crucified... and no doubt you could see their wounded disappointment, and the devastation of their hopes and dreams **as they trudged dejectedly down the road toward Emmaus.** You can almost hear the grief in their words of

vs. 21:

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

They had placed their hope in him, and it had been crushed. and what a haunting cry of despair, "but we had hoped..." **We hoped**, and built our lives on Jesus and his ministry. **We hoped**, and left our occupations and homes to follow him. **We trusted**, but now that hope has turned to grief, defeat and despair... **so we are leaving Jerusalem and going home to Emmaus.** But Emmaus is more than just a geographical spot on the map. **Emmaus is where we go when life gets to be too much for us. It's where we go when we feel lost, abandoned and beaten, to escape and get away to nurse our hurts and wounds it's when disappointment is too real & overwhelming.** But as they are traveling along their road to Emmaus, they are joined by their risen Lord, but they don't know it. Such irony, that Jesus, the only one who really understands all that happened, would ask the travelers, "what things took place in Jerusalem?"

Isn't it interesting that when Jesus asks that question, they can correctly recount all the facts about what happened: including the stone rolled away, the empty tomb & angels, and even the testimony of the women who saw Jesus--- -- **and yet they do not understand -- they do not believe.** Often times when we are struggling with loss and disappointment, we can be so caught up with our own disasters and problems, and so dwell on the hurts, issues and failures of our lives, that we actually miss seeing the presence of Jesus -- -- **the grace is there, but we just don't see it or recognize it. This story of the walk to Emmaus goes deeper than just a**

simple resurrection appearance story. This story is also about our own faith journey speaking to our hurts, disasters, losses and disappointments, where we struggle with broken dreams and failed hopes... **and the grace always present as the promise and assurance, that Jesus is with us always, and walking with us always, even when we don't see or recognize him ...** for it is often amid our deepest disasters and disappointments and when our lives are turning against our hopes and dreams, that we **MOST** need to be conscious of God's abiding presence. **Notice when and how our risen Lord's presence is revealed.**

First, it is when they invite Jesus to stay with them. That part they got right, wanting to be with Jesus, and in the fellowship of the meal they shared with him, Jesus is revealed and their eyes were opened,

vs. 30-31.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Those words, "he took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them"

This is the same language Jesus used in several occasions, at the feeding of the multitude and at the Last Supper. Luke is teaching that there is a theological connection, that in a mysterious and unexplainable way, **we are present with Jesus in the sacrament of Communion, a wonderful fellowship we share at the Lord's Table.** As they recognized after the meal, the presence of Jesus was also revealed in the interpretation of Scripture,

vs. 32

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

The presence of Jesus with them and they with him, was revealed through the faithful interpretation of Scripture, and in sharing the meal and fellowship of Communion. **And this is important to notice,** that when their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, then **in response,** they rushed off to tell others the Good News **and so should we, and so should we.** Luke wants us to know through this story, that our God, who will not abandon or leave us to struggle alone, walks with us always through all our broken dreams and losses. The Emmaus Road is where our loving God comes looking for us, and finds us.

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And as we approach the Lord's Table today, Luke wants us to know, that when we are drawn together in and by Word and Sacrament, we're in the living Presence of our risen Lord and Savior... **and that is the power, promise and hope of God's grace that can transform even our worst disasters into Good News. Thanks be to God, for he is risen indeed!**