

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
Unsuspecting Witnesses
Luke 24:13 – 35

Dear friends, greetings in the name of our *risen* Lord, Jesus Christ! I am so glad that you have joined us to worship! If there is one central characteristic about St. Timothy's, it is that we are a church that *loves* to worship! We love it, because in worship, we join our church community in shifting our focus to our True North. We shift our focus from ourselves to Jesus, the One who *is* worthy.

If there is one thing we have *recognized* during this time, it is that we love to worship *with* one another. For many of us, we never realized just how *encouraging* it is to gather together in the flesh as a *community*, until that was no longer an option. For the sake of love of our neighbor, it is critical that we don't meet together for the time being. But I sincerely hope that you are connecting with one another and encouraging one another in faith.

Together, we are the church, and we are encouraged and shaped by each other's faith. We can't, and we don't, walk this journey of faith alone.

Today, we join two of Jesus' disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are grief-stricken and devastated. They followed a man, a prophet, they had believed in. He was powerful, charismatic, and everyone noticed. He was not like anyone they had ever met before, and they hoped that this man would be the one to overthrow the government. They hoped that he would become king, so they followed him to Jerusalem. But instead of becoming king, they saw him handed over and condemned to death as the worst kind of criminal. They expected him to win, and he died instead. Their hope was destroyed; there was nothing left to do. On the third day, women came back, saying that they had seen an empty tomb and that angels told them that Jesus had risen. But it all seemed like nonsense, so no one believed the women.

It is finally time to go. There is nothing more to be done, so they accept their loss and they leave. But they can't stop talking about it. What *actually* happened? They walk their way through the events. Why did the women say what they did, and did Peter also see an empty tomb? Was Jesus' body stolen? Who would do something like that? Why couldn't Jesus have conquered their enemies? He was such a

wonderful person. Why did he have the powers he had and yet could not defeat their enemy? Why didn't he fight? Why didn't he prepare everyone for battle? What will happen now? Why did he have to die?

Grief *fills* their bodies. What are they to do now? Will the Messiah come during their lifetime? As they are talking, a man joins them. He wants to know what they are talking about. How can he *not* know? This was the biggest event that has happened in a long time! The whole *city* got involved, both their people and the government. They tell him everything.

And then, in great surprise, he *criticizes* them. He tells them that they're dense, "'slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!'" (Lk 24:25b).

Ouch!

He probes their understanding. "'Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?'" (Lk 24:26). He interprets Scripture to explain to them what *kind* of Messiah was promised. The Messiah is *not* to be a conquering hero, but a suffering *servant*. The Messiah wins through *suffering*. Suffering is not a sign of *defeat* but of *success*.

This man is *so compelling* that when they get to their destination, they beg, nay, they *force*, him to stay. They are like that grandma who won't take "no" for an answer. My grandma would say, "You don't get fat if you don't eat," and she would proceed to *plunk down* more rhubarb pie onto your plate. These two *won't* allow this man to leave. He *must* stay with them.

They make preparations for dinner, and then he becomes *their* host. He takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and begins to give it to them (Lk 24:30). Suddenly, their eyes are *opened*, and he disappears. Somehow, they *knew* it was him on the road. Somehow, their hearts *knew* that it was Jesus, even though their eyes could not recognize him. Their hearts were *burning*!

It's fascinating, the things Jesus decides to do after his resurrection. We don't know who these disciples are, yet they have this *incredible* encounter with Jesus. In Luke, these two unknown disciples are the *first* to see the resurrected Jesus.

But why would Jesus take such care to reveal himself to unknown people like this? Shouldn't Jesus' closest disciples have seen him first? Shouldn't *they* have been the first ones to experience the empty tomb? It seems *unfair* that they didn't get special treatment. *Women* were the first to see the empty tomb and to hear the good news, but they weren't reliable witnesses. Why on *earth* would Jesus have chosen women as the first witnesses and unknown disciples as the first to encounter the risen Jesus?

Scripture doesn't give answers to these questions, but what *is* clear is that this is how God desired it to be. It could have happened *any other way*, but it didn't. Jesus *didn't* choose the most trusted, the most talented, or the most influential witnesses. He chose people without influence; he chose common, even unreliable people. He chose to reveal himself in his resurrection much as he did before he died, with unsuspecting witnesses.

If we take a closer look at Scripture, we recognize that this is *often* the case – God uses unsuspecting witnesses. We think about the great leader, Moses, whom God chose to set His people free from slavery. But we remember that he had a dark past and a stuttering problem, and he tried to pass off his call to someone else. We think about that dense and impetuous disciple, Peter, who never seemed to get anything right. But we remember that he was the one upon whom the church was built, and he was an incredible leader in the early church. We think about doubting Thomas from last week, the skeptic, the one we criticize for needing proof. But we remember that Jesus *never* criticized him and instead *showed* him exactly what he wanted to see, and Thomas began the church in India. We read about the characters in Scripture, and we tend to think one thing about them. They are either good or bad; they're without complexity.

And we quickly apply this to ourselves – good or bad, useful or not useful. God wants to do something through me or God doesn't. We are quick to think that He doesn't because: we are too old, too young, too sensitive, not smart enough, don't have enough gifts, put our feet in our mouth, don't have charisma, are too serious, have too many problems, will never seem to get it right...We *all* have self-

doubt, and we too readily believe that we need to be “good” or “special” for God to reveal Himself or to do something important through us.

But God doesn’t work within our categories. God reveals Himself to and works through unsuspecting witnesses all the time, unsuspecting witnesses like Chris. (Play Chris’ video.)

What an incredible story of God’s work in the life of someone in this congregation! Jesus has brought healing and restoration to Chris and has led him into a flourishing Alpha ministry at CityTeam. Chris is an unsuspecting witness of the power and love of Jesus.

And this is *your* calling. You *too* are called to be a witness of Jesus, to share what Jesus has done for you and how he has shown himself to you. You are just the kind of unsuspecting witness that Jesus wants. He wants to reveal himself to you, and he wants to reveal himself through you.

If Jesus hasn’t revealed himself to you yet, I encourage you not to throw in the towel. Remember the disciples who forced Jesus to stay with them until their eyes were opened. Beg him to stay and to reveal himself to you. Listen to stories of faith. Practice loving your neighbor.

Jesus *is* present. He *is* alive! And may we be witnesses of that truth.