

Sermon – 3rd Easter
Luke 24:13-35
April 30, 2017
“Where Have I Seen Those Hands Before?”

In the summer of 1999 I was on my pastoral internship in Grenora, North Dakota - the extreme northwestern corner of that state. Just over the Montana line from Grenora was the town of Freud, and every summer Freud had a festival called “Crazy Days.” One of the festival’s craziest events was the “*honey calling contest*”, which my honey Marcella insisted we enter. So myself and a dozen other men – mostly ranchers from the area far as I could tell were blindfolded and our respective “honeys” formed a circle around us and starting calling out “honey.” We were of course supposed to recognize our “honey” and walk toward them. I remember vividly my “honey’s” voice growing increasingly agitated as I swirled around unable to recognize hers from any of the others. I did not fare well in the contest, nor as I recall in the car on the way home that night!

It can be embarrassing, to say the least, to not recognize someone you should recognize. Two guys, followers of Jesus no less, had such an experience on the day of our Lord’s resurrection. Luke tells us the two were walking along when Jesus came up to them and they started a conversation. Like others that day who should have recognized Jesus - Mary Magdalene who mistook Jesus for a gardener or Thomas who would not believe unless he saw crucifixion marks - these men did not, perhaps could not believe reports that Jesus was alive. Instead they talked about what they had *hoped* Jesus would have done for them - if he’d lived that is. I’m not certain we can draw conclusions as to tone of voice from our text, but anytime you hear someone say “*how foolish you are*” you can bet it’s not in a complimentary tone! So I don’t suppose Jesus spoke in a complimentary way. But of the many pieces of good news in the resurrection stories, one certainly has to be that Jesus does not dismiss fools. It seems he forgives them, instructs them and then turns them into fools for Christ.

And so, our lesson says, beginning with the Old Testament, with Moses and then all the prophets, Jesus instructed – by walking these men through a Bible study for the ages! Can you imagine creation’s God describing the creation – which is about more than the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. Our creation story reveals the stunning decision of God who chose not to spend eternity exclusively in the company of angels who adored him, but also in the company of sinners who so often do not. Then Jesus would have talked about Abram and Sarah, anything but promising candidates for nation building at the age of 80 and 90 respectively and who knew nothing of God until God chose them to be *the two* humans through whom God would reconcile all humans to their creator again.

Then would have come the rescue story we call the Exodus, when Pharaoh King of Egypt, who at the very least represented a human race whose heart was set hard against God, and who may have represented Satan himself, God’s enemy from the beginning, showed his true colors. So instead of merely deceiving God’s children Satan tried to annihilate them. Jesus would have taught these men that as God delivered Israel from death to life through water the baptism Jesus would soon command his followers to have would do the same. Jesus would have reminded them that on the heels of that ancient water rescue came wilderness testing – refining Israel as temptations would now refine the new Israel – the church.

He would have pored over all the times Israel was far from up to the task of being God's reconciling mission to the world. But rather than give up on them God rescued them through successors to Moses like Joshua, Gideon, David the great King of Israel to Josiah one of their very last ones. All the while God sent prophets, whose tone was anything but complimentary but whose message never changed – *“return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”* Jesus would have explained how these prophets looked forward to a day they would never see, when Israel's deliverance and the salvation of world would come not from another prophet – no matter how mighty in word or deed, but from God disguised as a servant. Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, Amos and Obadiah, Jonah and Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Haggai and finally Malachi who said the day was coming when God *“would turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and children to their fathers – or else would leave the land of those who would not be reconciled....cursed”*.

But instead of lamenting the curse of the last three days, Jesus' Bible study changed the perspective of these men from the here and now to the ages. Every word of Moses and those prophets, against all logic, expectation and appearances, was fulfilled in the events of the last three days. And Jesus did all of this in the time it took to walk seven miles. I guess you can do that when you know the story. Our lesson does not say how Jesus the guest became the host who blessed the meal but that doesn't matter. What matters is that looking up to the heaven he created and was about to return to Jesus said; *“Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the ground.”* When Jews did that they would raise the bread they were blessing. And in that moment men slow to understand – understood they were dining with the God who made the hills on which was sown the seed, the clouds that brought the rain and the sun that coaxed the seed from the ground that became that bread.

Recognition, as I have discovered, is better late than never. They'd seen those hands before healing, challenging false teachers one minute, picking up children and blessing them the next - hands that the Apostle John later saw in his vision we call the Book of Revelation, hands that took their wounds with them into eternity so that John would write *“then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain”* This Bible study wasn't walking two guys to Emmaus...it was walking them to eternity – by walking them back to the beginning and Genesis 3 - the story of two sinners named Adam and Eve who should have been slain for their sin but weren't. It's a story known as humanity's fall from grace – but it's really the story of an amazing grace.

Genesis 3:21 says; *“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife Eve and clothed them.”* Picture the hands of God placing garments of grace on a pair of *“shivering for fear of death”* shoulders. Recognize as you must that those shoulders were yours. Rejoice as you may that the hands that have you covered belong to Jesus. AMEN