

WD April 19, 2021
Pastor Matthew Woods

“Then Their Eyes Were Opened” -Luke 24

Getting Reacquainted

A few years ago, our family went back home to attend the funeral of my wife’s grandmother. We were sitting in the pews during visitation at the church. Her grandmother had been part of that church her whole life. As we sat around talking and reminiscing a friend of Tricia’s mom wandered by. Apparently, she had not seen her mom for a long time. She looked at Tricia, who looks a lot like her mom, and called out her mom’s name, “Patty?” We could tell by the lady’s face that she wasn’t exactly certain if she was talking to the right person. One can only guess why she was so confused. Maybe the last time she saw Tricia’s mom she looked a little bit younger and in a different context. Maybe it was because Tricia was sitting next to her dad in the pew at that moment. Who knows really but it was clear she confused Tricia with her mom. She looked right at my wife and couldn’t tell for sure.

I’ve also experienced this for myself more than a couple of times. I have encountered members of our congregation in stores or restaurants and they somehow don’t even recognize me. They sort of look right through me, over me, around me, and at me but somehow my face doesn’t register to them. Maybe because I wasn’t wearing a collar at the time or because we’re not meeting in church. I could walk right on by them without even a blink. Then I call their name and suddenly the light comes on. The moment is usually defined by surprise and a brief conversation. This is what I think of when Mary went looking for Jesus’ body in John 20:11-18. She runs right into Jesus but somehow thinks Jesus is the gardener. Only when Jesus calls her by name does she recognize Jesus.

The Emmaus Disciples

Something similar is happening on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. Consider the text. “Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him....

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So, he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Notice verse 16, “but they were kept from recognizing Jesus...” Jesus is right there walking along with them for seven miles. They could see his face, hear his voice, and yet somehow there was a disconnect. Only when Jesus broke the bread—something in the way He

broke that bread caused them recognize Him. And then we hear their reaction. Verse 32 tells us, “They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” Even in the disconnect there is something familiar.

When the Scriptures Are Opened to Us

I always appreciate it when someone is able to offer a new insight into scriptures that are familiar to me. No doubt when the disciples from Emmaus walked with Jesus, they had heard the scriptures that Jesus was teaching from. These scriptures were familiar but not fully understood. Jesus helped them see those scriptures as they were meant to be known. And when the Emmaus disciples realized it was Jesus who had been teaching them they ran back and told the disciples whom we know were still hiding. The burning in their hearts for the Word became their outward joy.

What am I getting at today? The scriptures cannot be read once and then be expected to be fully appreciated. Sometimes it takes several visits to those pages to fully appreciate and understand what they are trying to tell us. Each time a little more is revealed. While at the same time if like the woman looking for my mother-in-law, we are away from those scriptures a long time we may not fully recognize those scriptures as we once did. We can forget that studying the scriptures and practicing what they teach is the same as building a relationship with the Lord. Jesus is the Word made flesh after all (John 1). The more we spend time with the scriptures the more we spend time with Jesus. It’s a relationship that is being built not just knowledge.

I love it when a light bulb goes off because something new has been discovered. For example, I can’t tell you how many times I have read John 20 at Easter. Years ago, a professor opened my eyes to something I hadn’t caught before. In verse 11 we hear that Mary looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where Jesus’ body had been. One at the head and the other at the foot. It was pointed out that this is reminiscent of the Ark of the Covenant where the presence of God was between the Cherubim (Exodus 25:22). The Cherubim faced each other on the top of the ark and the pillar of cloud and fire were above that spot. In the tomb Jesus is no longer between the Cherubim but with His people in the flesh and risen from the dead. I love it when someone can open up my mind to see those connections. It makes the Word fuller and more exciting to read. And the best part, once I learned that little connection, I have not forgotten it. What I had been kept from recognizing I finally came to see. And I am sure there is much more for me to see in the Word of God.

Pursuing A Relationship With the Word of God

So, I encourage to become familiar with God’s Word. I would encourage you to approach it not like a novel but like one might pursue a marriage. Engage it every day with the hopes of building the relationship and knowing it more and more fully. By doing so we get more familiar and will grow closer to the Lord. What’s more we will become better equipped to recognize the truth of that Word in other contexts; in a classroom, at work, even at the store or restaurant; in places we would not normally or necessarily be looking for it. And hopefully as we go out-n-about we will recognize Jesus whatever the context in which we find ourselves—Like the Emmaus Disciples on the road to somewhere; or like the disciples behind locked doors because of Covid; or even like Mary Magdalene when we are struggling to understand when our world turns up-side-down. Whatever the context we pray that the Lord would open our eyes to see Jesus and recognize His work in our lives.

And now the Lord bless you and Keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30