

The Faithful Word
Luke 24:13-35

It's not often that you get to hear what people really think about you. Most of the time, folks hold back their true feelings, at least when they know you are listening. But every now and then, a friend of a friend gives you the real low down, or maybe you overhear a candid comment. Then you know where you really stand.

That's the situation in which Jesus found Himself as he joined these two travelers on their way to Emmaus. They didn't have a clue Who He was, all during the trip. And in their ignorance, they told Him exactly what they thought of Him.

Now, make no mistake, they had a good opinion of Jesus. And what they said about Him was true, at least as far as it went. They said, for example, that He was a prophet mighty in word and deed. And He was – He was the mightiest prophet who ever lived, the truest representation of the nature and image of God. None of Jesus' followers who had heard His words or who had seen His miracles could possibly doubt that, right?

They also said that they, along with many other people, had hoped Jesus would be the One Who would redeem Israel. They looked at His amazing, miraculous power and had come to the conclusion that He was the Messiah, the Son of David, the One Who God's people expected to restore Israel's independence and rule over His people in perfect justice.

But that's why His crucifixion didn't make any sense to them. How could such a powerful prophet be rejected by the very leaders that God had appointed over His people? How could the chief priests and all the rest of the religious leaders have condemned such a prophet as a blasphemer? And how could the Messiah of God have been put to death? For if He was dead, how could He rule over His people, leading them in righteousness as the prophets had said He would?

No, there's no way that a dead man could be the Messiah – at least, that's what they told the resurrected Jesus. There's no way that the women who told them of an empty tomb could possibly have been right. No matter what they may have believed about Jesus during His life and ministry, in their eyes His death disproved His claims to be a true prophet, to be the Messiah. That's what these two dejected disciples said – to Jesus Himself.

The situation is laden with irony isn't it? Here they are, telling Jesus about how Jesus' death has shattered all their hopes! The man whose death destroyed their fondest dreams is actually alive and walking down the road with them! What could be more absurd?

So, why does Jesus string them along for the better part of the seven mile trip? Why doesn't He allow them to have a personal experience of Him immediately, like He did with Mary Magdalene in the garden, or like He did with Paul on the road to Damascus? Instead, why does

He insist on leading them through an in-depth study of the Old Testament? Why doesn't He just say, "Hey, wake up! Look at Me! I'm alive?"

Yes, there had to be some good reason that Jesus waited to tell them Who He is until after the Bible study. Perhaps it was because He wanted them to have more to rely on than just their own senses. After all, our senses can deceive us, can't they? After Jesus disappeared, they could have begun to second-guess themselves, that is, if all they had to go on was their own memory, right? They could have begun to think that their conversation with Jesus was just a dream, or maybe a grief-induced hallucination.

Or perhaps Jesus insisted on doing this Bible study for our sake. After all, if He could explain to these two disciples how the Old Testament prophets had predicted everything about His life, death and resurrection, then we wouldn't just be relying on the testimony of a few eyewitnesses to know that Jesus was Who He said He is. No, we would have much greater confidence in the truth of Jesus' resurrection if we could be sure that it had all been predicted hundreds of years before He was even born.

And so instead of simply appealing to their eyes and ears, and even instead of appealing to His own predictions of His death and resurrection, Jesus turns to the prophets. He ties the truth of His resurrection to an unfailing, inerrant standard. In such a way, He ties our experience of the Living Word of God to our understanding of the written Word of God. He shows us that our faith in Jesus rests most securely not on our experiences and not just on the testimony of the New Testament, but on the way that Jesus' life fulfilled what the Old Testament prophets said about Him.

For Jesus wasn't just a challenging teacher and a miracle-working healer. No, His coming was promised as far back as the time of Adam's fall into sin. Jesus was the seed of the woman that God Himself said would crush the head of the serpent. Jesus was the One Whom God promised would destroy the power of Satan, the power of sin itself.

And Jesus is the ultimate truth to which so many other things in the Old Testament point. When God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, Abraham trusted God enough to be willing to do it. And God proved to be worthy of Abraham's trust, when He provided a substitute for Isaac, a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. But it was Jesus Who was the true substitute not only for Isaac, but for all those who share Abraham's faith.

In the days of Moses, God told the people to put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so that He would pass over them and not slay their firstborn sons. But it is Jesus Who is the true Passover lamb, God's firstborn Who was slain so that God might pass over us, instead of punishing us, as our sins so richly deserve.

As we learned at our Maundy Thursday service, after God gave the Law to His people at Mount Sinai, they took a blood oath to obey Him. They spilled the blood of animals in testimony that their blood should be shed if they broke God's law. But at the last supper, Jesus said that the blood of the covenant is His own blood. Jesus was thus promising that if we break God's law, it is Jesus who will die for us.

When the people disobeyed God in the wilderness, He sent serpents among them to destroy them. But as we read in our responsive reading this morning, God also gave them a way they could be delivered. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole so that all the people could see it. God said that if anyone who had been bitten by a serpent would look up at that bronze serpent, he would be saved. Even this strange experience pointed to Jesus – for He was the One Who was lifted up on the cross so that all who look to Him in faith might be saved not only from physical death, but from the spiritual death that sin always demands as its wages.

At the end of Moses' life, God told Moses that another prophet would come from the midst of the people, a prophet Who would speak all that God commands Him, a true prophet all of whose predictions would come true. And while there were many faithful prophets between the time of Moses and Jesus, it was only Jesus Who fulfilled everything the rest of the prophets foretold. It was Jesus by Whose life and death and resurrection all the rest of the words of all the rest of the prophets of God were proven to be true.

But Jesus was not only our great High Priest, laying down His life for us. And He was not only a great prophet, speaking and fulfilling the Word of God. For God also told David that, after his own lifetime was over, God would establish the kingdom of one of David's descendants. God promised that through this Son of David, the house of David and the kingdom of David would endure forever, and that his throne would be established forever. Again, all these promises have been fulfilled in Jesus, great David's greater Son. Because of His death and resurrection all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given into His hands.

Yes, Jesus fulfilled all these and so many more Old Testament prophecies down to the smallest detail. Isaiah said that He would be born of a virgin and that His light would first be seen in Galilee. Micah said that he would be born in Bethlehem. Zechariah said that he would come into his capital city not in pride but in humility, riding on a donkey's colt. How could all these things have come true if Jesus wasn't the Messiah God had promised would reign on David's throne?

But the prophets also accurately predicted the manner of Jesus' reign. Isaiah said in chapter 42 of his prophecy that Jesus would indeed bring judgment to the nations, but without crying out or lifting up His voice, without violating the weakness of even a bruised reed. A few

weeks ago we read how in chapter 53, Isaiah describes a suffering savior, despised and rejected by men, by whose stripes we are healed, One who was wounded and bruised for our transgressions and iniquities. Isaiah said that we are the wayward sheep, but that the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

And David prophesied most powerfully about his greater Son, predicting so many details of Jesus' crucifixion in Psalm 22. David described so many of those terrible events over 1000 years before any of them happened – the mocking laughter, the pierced hands and feet, the soldiers gambling for garments, the thirst, the helplessness, the loneliness – it's all there in Psalm 22.

No, it's no wonder that Jesus said in verse 26 of today's passage that the Christ, the Messiah had to suffer all these things – all the Old Testament prophets said he would. But they also said that after his suffering, the Christ would enter into His glory. For if Psalm 118 predicted that the religious leaders of Jesus' day would reject Him like the builders of a house reject a stone, Psalm 118 also says that rejected stone will become the head of the corner. If Isaiah 53 says that the Suffering Servant will be crushed and put to grief, Isaiah 53 also says that He will see His offspring and prolong His days. Isaiah says that because the Servant of God bore the iniquities of the people of God, God will allot Him a portion with the great.

No wonder David predicted in Psalm 110 that God would say to the Christ, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." No wonder the prophet Daniel saw Jesus as the Son of Man, presented before the Ancient of Days as the One given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him.

So, what does this Bible study on the road to Emmaus mean for us? It means that we don't have to see Jesus with our physical eyes, and we don't have to hear His voice with our physical ears in order to believe that what He said about Himself is true. For we not only have the reliable eyewitness testimony of His resurrection found in the New Testament. We also have all the testimony of all the prophets through all the thousands of years that God spoke His Word to His people.

And that means that we have so many reasons to trust our risen Lord to be Who He claimed to be – our prophet, priest and king. It means we can be certain that Jesus is the shepherd Who will guide us, the Lord Who will protect us and rule over us, the Savior Who has died for us. It means we can know that the promises Jesus made to us are true, including that most precious promise that we read responsively this morning: he that believeth on the Son, everyone who trusts in Jesus, has everlasting life. Let's celebrate this good news as we sing His praise.