

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
April 26, 2020  
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### On the Road Again

“Roads go ever, ever on...” I love this quote, it is from the last page of *The Hobbit*, by Tolkein. Today in the Gospel we find the disciples on a road, and a road is a likely setting for Luke to tell the stories of Jesus. Eric Berreto, a New Testament Professor at Princeton, gives a nice summary of the role roads play in Luke. He said,

*“A journey brings Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. A road is the narrative setting for the parable of the Good Samaritan. A road leads the prodigal back home to his father.”* For almost ten chapters in Luke, *“Jesus sets his eyes toward Jerusalem.”*\* This is known as the travel narrative, where we find stories that reflect Luke’s style, that is stories told with some flourish and imagination.

The roads wind through the Book of Acts where, Paul encounters the risen Jesus on his way to Damascus. Travel sparks the imagination, and roads are how we explore that imagination. The roads we take can lead us to love, or into danger, but most importantly, they connect us to each other. *“...Roads become a symbol of a faith on the move.”*\* How Jesus lived is our roadmap, He is the way. Until I thought about the part roads play in scripture, I did not like the slogan, “Jesus is my co-pilot.” Now however, I appreciate that He is the navigator, but I am still the driver. When I get lost, I realize that I took the wrong turn in not following the map He gave me.

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus brings us to the end of the Third Gospel. Irony, misunderstanding, drama, and a reveal, are components of a wonderful and powerful story. The themes Luke weaves together in this narrative are table fellowship, hospitality, faithfulness, and discipleship. The scene on this road sheds light on the future of Christ’s church, this will be a church on the move, sent out, as Berreto put it, by a *“...Jesus, who walks alongside us even when we don’t recognize him.”*\*

*“...Jesus who walks alongside us even when we don’t recognize him.”* This line haunted me after I read it. It made me wonder who I am walking alongside on my road of life? I know, that like the disciples, I am walking with my family and friends. Sometimes, I encounter people I do not know or recognize along the way. Often, they do not look like me. Sometimes they challenge my intellect, question my actions, or even frighten me. Most times however, they become part of my story, welcome companions. I realized that how I show hospitality, how I greet and welcome them into conversation, and invite them to walk with me, and I with them on this labyrinth of life, sets the tone of our relationship—people respond to how they are treated.

Thinking about roads brought up even more questions. With whom am I walking that I would literally wash their feet, host them for dinner, or invite them to stay the night? Do I follow the guidance given in the Gospel of table fellowship, hospitality, faithfulness, and discipleship? Jesus does not just walk with us, Jesus is the way, Jesus is the map who guides us in the right ways to go. If Jesus walks alongside us, even when we don’t recognize him, who are we walking with, who is the hands and feet of Jesus in our lives? What if they are people we do not recognize in that roll, or someone we walk past? One of the people who walked with me, who I did not recognize as Jesus’ hands and feet in the world was my English teacher, Mrs. Padolski. She assigned us to read *The Hobbit*, she was kind and patient, especially with me—a sometimes mischievous and unfocused student. I so liked and admired her, and I told her that at the end of my senior year. She was surprised to hear that, and I am sure that she would never imagine that I would end up writing—let alone writing sermons. But, I could never imagine being able to write them without the lessons I learned from her, and many other teachers. “Roads go ever, ever on...” In our

case, we know our journey never ends, because ours is an eternal journey when we invite Jesus to walk along with us, when we put our trust in Him.

All this talk of roads, but right now, we all *can't wait to get back on the road again*. Back to what we once thought of as normal. When we get through this COVID-19 mess, are there any roads you plan to avoid once you can travel freely? This time is an opportunity to let go of the things you have always done because you felt obligated. This time is a rare gift of opportunity to choose how you will re-enter the world and engage it on all new terms. Too often, I think that we do things and believe things because somebody tells us that it is the smart thing to do, or the cool thing to be connected to, and we never really assess for ourselves what is right for our lives. We often fail to examine the evidence in front of us. I do not think that seeing is always believing. Even when we have seen something with our own eyes, we often choose to believe what we are told to believe. If something does not make sense to us, if logic defies a thing, we may refute what we see with our own eyes.

In the Gospel, the disciples on the road to Emmaus hold the idea that Jesus is dead. They walk and talk directly with Jesus, yet they do not recognize Him. I wondered what they were thinking? “Wow, this guy looks so much like Jesus, he could be His twin, for a moment, I thought it was actually Jesus. But, Jesus is dead, and I need to get back to being shocked and sad.” Then, I tried to get in Jesus’ head, and imagine what He was thinking, “Cool, there are two of my disciples, I need to hurry and catch up, they will be so surprised when see me!” Then, nothin’! The disciples got nothin’, nada, they see, but they don’t see. They see what they think they should see because they are not looking through loving, faithful eyes. I think it is because they too bought into what everyone else was saying—everyone that is, except a couple of women who told an impossible story. Maybe Jesus did not say their names the way He said Mary’s in the garden before she recognized him. But there in front of Jesus, they did not trust their own eyes. They were wallowing in their sorrow, worried about what would happen to them next, kicking themselves for having gotten it all so wrong. Perhaps, they were so caught up in the grief and anxiety of the past days and what the future might hold for them, they could not believe their own eyes. Shock, grief, stress, and anxiety keeps us from seeing what is true, and right in front of our faces. Remember, the first stage of grief is denial.

Here is a truth for you, a truth you can believe, a truth you can lean on, a belief you can lean into when your road of life gets rough: “...*Jesus walks alongside you even when you don't recognize him.*”—even when you are wrapped up in your own self, and not very good company. Jesus, is the truth and the way, *and He walks alongside you even when you don't recognize him.* If you remember anything from my words today, please remember this: be faithful, believe the miracles you see in your life, live into the wonder of what God has in store for you. Follow Jesus’ example, and show hospitality, sit at the metaphoric table with your friends, all of God’s people, no exceptions, look for new ways to love one another as Jesus loves you—even when you are difficult to love, because “...*Jesus walks alongside you even when you don't recognize him.*” We may not be able to break bread together now, but there are other ways to share, and to nourish each other, and give what we have with those most in need. When this pandemic road levels out, decide what you are going to let go of, and what new ways you will engage the world. Lighten your load, and take time on this journey to appreciate the wonder of all of God’s creation.

Finally, let’s take a moment to imagine Jesus. What is He doing? What is He doing at this moment, in this pandemic? Is He standing up for those who need justice, healing the sick, giving hope to the poor, feeding people, loving people—beautiful, flawed, people just as they are? Then go do the same. Be the Jesus you imagine, follow His roadmap. Walk the road Jesus walked and put your faith on the move. Who knows, someone you are walking with may recognize Jesus in you. Amen

\* [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4442](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4442)

Acts 2:14a,36-41; Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17