

Third Sunday of Easter

THE EMMAUS OUTBOUND

Luke 24:13-35

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

13Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him, 17and he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah would suffer these things and then

enter into his glory?" 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

DIAGNOSIS: Dead-End

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Exiting the City*
Two disciples are outbound from the city "sad" and incredibly disappointed. Jesus, in whom they have staked so much, has let them down—big time, or so they think. They sigh, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (v. 21), but instead he has been "condemned to death and crucified" (v. 20). In the midst of their disappointment they leave Jerusalem and head for Emmaus. Today's outbounds (whether from Jerusalem or wherever) are similarly God-disillusioned individuals. Call the detours they take addictions, hedonism, materialism, depression; they all have one thing in common: they lead away from "the city of God."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Failure of Recognition*

On the Emmaus outbound, the two disciples' "eyes were kept from recognizing" Jesus (v. 16). Not only do they not recognize who Jesus is in a literal sense, but they suffer even a worse "failure of recognition," one that makes them "foolish" and "slow of heart to believe" (v. 25). That failure (we surmise from what Jesus says) is that they just don't "get" the scriptures. As Jesus explains, they have failed to comprehend what "Moses and all that the prophets have declared" (v. 25)—specifically, that it is "NECESSARY that the Messiah would suffer these things and then enter into his glory" (v. 26). We can tag onto that, because we have the same kind of blinded hearts, that behind that failure of recognition is another recognition-breakdown: the failure to see themselves (ourselves) as so desperate that they (we) NEED a suffering Messiah at all.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dead End*

The Emmaus detour, like all ventures away from the city of God, eventually proves a dead end: While they are heading away from the city, Jesus and resurrection life are back in Jerusalem. Failure to recognize Jesus, ricochets on these disbelievers when Jesus does not recognize them: "I never knew you; away from me" (Matt 7:23). Setting off on the God-has-abandoned-me detour ends up exactly there: abandoned by God, dead with no outlet (dead end).

PROGNOSIS: Divine Rescue

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Rescued*

Jesus didn't give up on the two disciples. Instead, he "came near and went with them" (v. 15) and gently "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (v. 27) explaining WHY the Messiah had to suffer and die. We can surmise that they finally caught on that in HIM, God was not abandoning

them, but rather, as his name Immanuel implies, God truly was WITH them. Jesus, willing to be the kind of Messiah his followers needed—one who traveled the full distance of their dead-end lives—took a necessary but undesirable detour to Golgotha to rescue them back to God's city.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Recognition*

As Jesus talks, the two disciples' hearts burn within them, and when they see Jesus breaking and blessing bread, "their eyes were opened" and they "recognized him" (v. 31). Not only do they recognize Jesus the man, but Jesus the Messiah, "the one to redeem Israel" (v. 21). Their despair turns to such tremendous joy that they forget their Emmaus business and rush back to Jerusalem (v. 33). Elsewhere in Luke, such recognition is called "faith," and faith is what makes sinners recognizable to God.

Step 6: Final Diagnosis (External Solution) : *Returning*

The two no longer seek escape, they return to Jerusalem to tell their story (v. 33). But we can also look ahead and imagine them heading back to those other outbounds in order to do what Jesus had done for them: "come near" and "walk with" the suffering travelers walking their own dead-end routes. But this time they don't join in the hopelessness and despair; instead they assist these wayfarers to return to the city of God and reinterpret their lives and suffering in light of the crucified Messiah who redeems Israel.