

# April 30, 2017

# "Unbelievable?"



(3rd Sunday of Easter)

**Acts 2:14, 36-41; Luke 24:13-35**

What's more unbelievable? What God can accomplish through us or that we would embrace fear instead of love?

In the Thomas story from last week, we spent time thinking through how unbelievable the resurrection must have been to the disciples. But as we turn our thoughts to the disciples' mission and the burgeoning Church, belief in what God in Christ can do seems easy. That God can accomplish the Kingdom of Heaven with us seems wildly more far-fetched.

But it remains God's faith and faithfulness, God's irresistible and compelling love, that makes the difference. Like a groom inspired to write poetry he's never articulated for his bride, we find ourselves capable of unfathomable greatness because of the love of God that lives with and within us.



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## **Acts 2:14, 36-41**

**14** Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words!"

**36** "Therefore, let all Israel know beyond question that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

**37** When the crowd heard this, they were deeply troubled. They said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

**38** Peter replied, "Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away –as many as the Lord our God invites." **40** With many other words he testified to them and encouraged them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." **41** Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day.

- So, just about overnight, Peter goes from denier to spokesman, from hiding to public ministry. Do you think he would've done this if Jesus hadn't appeared to him (and the others)?

- Why do you think so many came forward? What do you imagine made "Peter's message" so powerful?
- What is more remarkable to you: the results that Peter got or his transformation? Which do you think God valued more?
- What do you think is possible for God through you? Through your church?

## **Luke 24:13-35**

**13** On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. **15** While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. **16** They were prevented from recognizing him.

**17** He said to them, "What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stopped, their faces downcast.

**18** The one named Cleopas replied, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?"

**19** He said to them, "What things?"

They said to him, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the

people as a prophet. **20** But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. **21** We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. **22** But there's more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning **23** and didn't find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn't see him."

**25** Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. **26** Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **27** Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.

**28** When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. **29** But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. **30** After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31** Their eyes were opened and they recognized him,

but he disappeared from their sight. **32** They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"

**33** They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. **34** They were saying to each other, "The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!" **35** Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

#### Footnotes:

**John 20:24** Or "the twin"

- What stands out to you about this story? Where do you see yourself?
- They were just three guys going down the road together until they realized the truth. Then everything was extraordinary. Why do you think they couldn't recognize Jesus until the breaking of the bread?



- Would they have had this encounter if they had not invited (demanded) that Jesus stay with them?
- (Genesis 18:1-15) Abraham offers hospitality to three strangers and receives the news that Sarah will give birth to Isaac. (Hebrews 13:2) Hospitality seems to be the doorway to amazing things with God. Why do you think that is?

## Commentary on the Luke passage by Bruce Epperly

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2014/04/lets-go-for-a-walk-the-adventurous-lectionary-for-may-4-2014/>

Easter is about embodied movement. Resurrection moved the cells as well as the soul of Jesus, and the cells and souls of his followers. Resurrection still gets us out of our comfort zones and calls us to the open road, spiritually, ethically, and sometimes physically.

I love to walk. Each morning, and virtually every day of the year, I walk from the church I pastor, South Congregational Church, in Centerville, MA, to the Craigville Conference Center, and back. This two mile walk takes me past a river, wetlands, and the Craigville beaches. I spend the walk observing the world around me and my own inner

thoughts. I often use the time for intercessory prayer and personal centering, taking in God's energy of love and sharing it with others. In recognition of my love for walking, one of my friends has sent me a paperweight that proclaims, solvitur ambulando, "it will be solved in the walking."

A walk and a meal can transform your life, and that's what happened in the encounter of Jesus with two of his earliest followers. Trudging down the road, two utterly confused followers are joined by a third man. Their world has been turned upside down by the events of the past week: celebration, conflict, violence, and death, and now the possibility that their martyred spiritual leader has come back to life. Resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion. It doesn't fit into any rational world view, including the theology of resurrection of the first century Jewish people. They could imagine a resurrection of all humanity at the end of history, but not the resurrection of a solitary individual.

But, they walk the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, first sharing their common grief, and then entering into a strange conversation with their unexpected companion, who unfolds the story of salvation through resurrection to them. Somehow, they cannot recognize their companion as the teacher and

healer Jesus. Perhaps, it is a bit of divine magic allowing them to gently adapt to a new way of seeing; perhaps, it is the highly energetic body of their companion that both reveals and conceals Jesus' identity.

Confused and grief stricken, the two men nevertheless reach out to the stranger. They invite him to supper, and come to know his identity as the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Their hospitality leads to a theophany, an encounter with the Risen Jesus, who is known in the simple Eucharistic acts of praying and eating.

Movement and meal lead to revelation, and then Jesus is gone, vanishing from their sight, but leaving them with warmed hearts, lively spirits, and energetic bodies. They are so energized that they walk seven miles back to Jerusalem to share their good news that Jesus is risen and on the road.

After breaking the bread, Jesus vanished from their sight. He may have needed to be on the move as well. God is not static, imprisoned by yesterday's revelations and the church's creeds and scriptures. God is alive and on the move, doing new things and sharing new insights with other pilgrims on the journey.

We really don't know where Emmaus is located. Several possibilities have been surfaced, but perhaps

vagueness is a virtue. In not localizing Emmaus, we can open to the possibility that Emmaus is everywhere. Wherever we are on the road and at every mealtime, Jesus comes to us, filled with energy and possibility, and the joy of resurrection. We can have new life, and we can be born again, right now at any venue. Let's keep moving, and chart new adventures, because Jesus walks beside us on the road.



## Commentary on the Acts passage by Scott Shauf

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/  
preaching.aspx?  
commentary\\_id=2042](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2042)

...The title "Messiah" (or "Christ," as in most translations) picks up on Jesus' status as David's heir (verses 29-31), David being the prototype of the Messiah in most Jewish thinking of the day. That Jesus is identified with both titles is contrasted in verse 36

with his treatment by Peter's own audience members: Jesus is the one "whom you crucified."

It is this contrast between Jesus' exalted status and the audience's treatment of him that forms the basis for the subsequent response of the audience. Clearly convicted of the identity of Jesus, the audience is "cut to the heart," a depiction of their deep anguish (verse 37). Unsure of the proper response, they ask Peter what to do. Peter gives them two actions to perform and two ensuing results (verse 38):

First, they are to "repent" (Gk metanoesate). This word will no doubt sound rather old-fashioned to many, if not most, Christians today, since it is not a part of our day-to-day vocabulary. It is perhaps used as often as not today in parody of old-time revival preaching. Here, however, the concern is not for any particular sins the audience may have committed -- there is no suggestion that they are especially immoral or otherwise bad sinners -- but rather for a basic reorientation of their lives with respect to Jesus.

Formerly, they were involved in putting Jesus to death; now they are to base their lives on his identity as Messiah and Lord. This repentance, this reorientation is more than just saying they are sorry. In fact, as verses 42-47 (the passage for next week) will make clear, it entails a complete

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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**—Scott Shauf  
(reflection on Acts passage)**

change of lifestyle, a life in accordance with Christ's true status and the activity of the Spirit.

Second, they are to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ." Baptism is usually narrated in Acts as the normal response to acceptance of the gospel message, constituting the believers' transition to the Christian community. Here it is the natural concomitant sign of repentance, the concrete act marking the reorientation of their lives to Christ and the Spirit.

The first result of their actions is the forgiveness of their sins. This is a common topic in Luke and Acts (see especially the last words of Jesus in Luke 24:46-49, a passage with quite a few connections to Acts 2). The message began with John the Baptist's preaching (Luke 3:3) and thus carries with it a certain eschatological (end-times) urgency -- while forgiveness of sins relates to one's present status before God, it is especially important as preparation for the coming Last Judgment (repentance is also associated with the importance of the coming Last Judgment in Acts; see especially 17:30-31).

The second result is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This, of course, is the whole point of Pentecost, and the Joel prophecy used in Peter's speech had declared that God's spirit was to be poured out on "all flesh,"

including old and young, female and male, and servants alongside the more usually esteemed (2:17-18).

Here, Peter makes clear that the Spirit is indeed to be given to all -- it was not a special gift only for the original community or its leaders. Verse 39 continues this thought, where he adds that "the promise" (a reference to the Spirit; see verse 33) is to be extended to "all who are far away" a hint of the spread of the Christian message and community to be narrated in the rest of Acts -- the Spirit will be given to all those who become part of the church.

Verse 40 follows up these words of Peter with a summary that Peter said many other things, summarizing his message as, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." The identity of what one is saved from is striking here. As verses 42-47 will make clear, the repentance called for entails a clear distinction of the church from the rest of the world -- again a reorientation of life in light of the recognition of Christ's status and the work of the Spirit. The concluding language of verse 41 emphasizes this further: Three thousand souls were "added" to the community. Salvation and Christian community go hand in hand.

## **Additional Thoughts**

- Where (and to whom) does hospitality fit in your life? What doors are you leaving open for God to walk through for you?
- What ordinary things might you be doing for which God has extraordinary plans?

