

SERMON- Easter 3 (A)
Charles R. Cowherd

Isaiah 15:1-6

1 Peter 1:17-23

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

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Luke 24:13-35 Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

OPENING:

“What things?”—Jesus asks to the disciples on the road.

It's funny, this cluelessness.

Like a good therapist who engages in talk therapy, like a kind friend who you can open up with, or a good attorney who wants to get the witness on the stand talking, or like a good fishermen who knows when to let the fish run, Jesus adopts this posture that is so open and available and welcoming.

Jesus, in that way, follow me here, is like the great TV detective Frank Columbo: from the show of that name which aired for decades.

Notice the similarities.

Columbo was always underestimated, and a bit frumpy, disheveled and even dirty.

Columbo seems, in every episode, to be losing until the very end.

That is, Evil seems to have won and death has victory...

Until he delivers his famous line: “and just one more thing...”

Columbo, like Jesus, also engages in this circumstantial speech that goes round and round but eventually, by just showing up again and again and again, finally leading to WHAT... confession.

Most amazingly Columbo is friendly with the murderer, even after he finds him out. In honor of Columbo, here are some cases for you to solve this morning.

Listen carefully.

CASE STORY 1:

Two people were walking on the road from Jerusalem after a big festival, they were upset because they could not find Jesus. They hoped upon hoped that they could find him but they had more or less given him up as lost... so they did what you do when you lose something, you got back to the last place where they had seen him.....

There they found Jesus, in Jerusalem teaching in the Temple.

The searchers, in this story, were Mary and Joseph. Jesus was 12 years old.

Luke tells *that* story at the start of his Gospel and then tells the one I just read at the end, these parallel versions bookend Jesus's story and they say something similar: What was hidden, is now in plain sight,

what was lost, was found.

who you thought Jesus was, turns out he was actually something entirely different.¹
In other words, in both stories, Resurrection happens.

Through this curious game of hide and seek, presence and absence, sorrow becomes hope, despair becomes joy, Death becomes life.

If you ever have lost a child in a crowd, even for a moment, you know that feeling, and you know a tiny taste of what the Resurrection feels like.

INTERLUDE:

Here's a story about that with a 'Cowherd' spin on it.

Two twins were playing in the woods behind their house, about 10 years old, without, I guess, having told anyone. Some hours later, I remember our father finding us, after what must have a long search, and him trying to express how relieved he was to have found us and *also* how *angry* he was at us, for going off like that without saying anything. "I am so happy you two are alive." so "Now I can kill you."

You can imagine that Mary and Joseph have the same mixture of feelings towards the twelve year old Jesus in this story

CASE STORY 2:

Still another story: two people were hungry, so they decided to eat and they decided to have the tastiest thing that they could see, a shiny red apple.

The woman and the man ate this food together. And because of *that* meal: "The eyes of both of them were opened."²

After it, they knew something about themselves that they had not known before. And they saw the world in a completely different way.

That man and woman were, of course, Adam and Eve. They were in Eden, not Emmaus. They were eating with the serpent not with Jesus. And they did not see God, but instead they saw that they were naked.

That story happens at the start of the Bible, in Genesis, it's the first meal in all of scripture, whereas the one from our Gospel is the "Last"—the "Last Supper."

Again you could say that those two meals bookend the Bible.

All throughout history, that tale, about the meal that Adam & Eve ate, has been told over and over, and how that meal led to exile and despair and death.

That first meal disconnected us from God but this one... the one at Emmaus... it

¹ Wright, N. T. 2004. *Luke for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. 298.

² Genesis 3.6-7

reverses the consequences of that meal and instead connects us to God forever. The story of that meal, of communion, of eucharist, that we tell over and over, each week, connects to God and to one another... and through the telling and the participating in that story and that meal we live forever.³

SHIFT

Luke tells this story with such artistry and skill that a preacher is cautious to try to improve upon it. We should just “let Luke cook” so to speak and as the kids are saying.

But just a couple of things about Jesus here that Luke highlights and seem appropriate to emphasize in this Easter season.

First, that the two disciples talk A LOT in this story, they have two hundred words, by my count, where as Jesus has about ¼ of that. I wish that it had been reversed.

But, like how I started with comparing Jesus to Columbo, notice Jesus:

he is so unassuming, so kind, so curious, so matter of fact:

“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

And they are incredulous: “You have not heard of all these things that have happened?”

“What things?”

Eventually he cannot take it any more and cuts him off “Oh how foolish you are...”

Which is nonetheless done in a tone of understanding and with a deep sigh. He has only been crucified, died and resurrected.

Jesus allows us to share our greatest griefs and misbegotten theories and stories.

Jesus shows up in our lives and offers to take that pain. Just when we thought he had gone.

CONCLUSION:

This pattern of showing up is strange, odd.

We want him to come back in a blaze of glory, on a chariot, hurling thunderbolts.

He has every reason to be SO ANGRY at the disciples for abandoning him, and ANGRY because then they won't believe the women who has seen him.

But the Story is told in whispers, in candlelight, with misdirection and humor.

³ Wright, 298

And maybe we have it backwards....

The disciples did not recognize Jesus, but Jesus recognized them.
He sees us through our sins, through our false selves, through our addictions and pathologies, through our worst days and our best.

Frederick Buechner puts it this way, movingly, he sees “each one us as the child in red” from Schindler’s List, a “secret in the dark, the saving and holy word that flickers among us like a red dress in a gray world.”⁴

AMEN

⁴ Buechner, Frederick. 2006. *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*. Harper, San Francisco. 253-254.