

A Trail of Words
Luke 24 36-48
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What I plan to do today is to draw a line of words between where we are in our human lives to where God wants us to be as disciples of the Lord. I'm going to do that by going through our text from Luke today. Then we're going to look at 4 character examples from the foundation of our faith, established nearly 2000 years ago through the opening of God's plan in the scriptures, through baptism, and through teaching and preaching.

In our ongoing Disciple bible study going on every Tuesday morning and Wednesday evening, we try to draw a line between what is called the Human Condition and the Marks of a Disciple. We follow a trail of scriptural words from our lives in the world to God's intent for our lives as children of the Lord.

How can we all do this? Well, that's our destination today.

But let me digress for a moment. I was raised on the west coast in Washington and Oregon. When I was growing up in my pre-teen years, we owned a cabin on Priest Lake in Northern Idaho; a place so beautiful it takes your breath away. As an 8-year-old I loved to go out in the boat and stare down through crystal clear water nearly 100 feet to see huge schools of cutthroat and silver trout. But what that lake was really known for was boasting the world records for both Mackinaw and Dolly Varden lake trout. The record 57lb Mackinaw was caught out of Hills Resort, **only 2 miles** from our cabin and we knew there was a picture of that fish on the wall but that was a long way for an 8yo to go. My friend Larry and I often set out to get to Hills, only to be stopped by the unknown twist in the forest trail or the fear of meeting one of the many black bears in the area. Once, when I had gotten almost all the way to the resort, I did meet a bear out there and after a brief introduction and guttural scream, we both set records for land speed running away from each other. Larry and I eventually made it to Hills after many months of trying and we saw that unbelievable, infamous picture of the huge fish. And that started a whole series of other stories that should start with "kids, don't try this at home".

So why the fish and bear story, Dale? Mostly because it's an illustration of how we, as mere mortals learn what's important very slowly in our lives and through experience and repetition. I have not been on the forest trail to Hills at Priest Lake in decades but, I remember the sounds and smells and every bend in the footpath like it was in front of me now. And, I remember the bear.

Jesus said, quoting Deuteronomy: ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Mat 4:4)

Let’s look at God’s words in our text for today from the Gospel of Luke...

Luke 24:36b-48

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Now this is 3 days after the crucifixion of Jesus, the man now standing before them. It’s thought that they were in the same upper room where Jesus had washed the Apostles feet, where they had shared the bread and the wine we now call communion. What they were talking about was that 2 disciples, Cleopas and another, had returned from Emmaus after having just walked with and been taught by Jesus. In that encounter: Jesus, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. After He had vanished from their sight, they asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:27, 32)

Jesus had opened their minds to scripture and the Spirit had scorched it into their hearts.

Back in the upper room...

37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

After all, the man Jesus who they thought sure was the Messiah, the King of the world, was alive just 3 days ago! But then he was crucified and had died, so He can’t be the Christ? But now He stood in their midst, so maybe he is the Son of God! How amazing is this? And then...

38 He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

Why? Are you kidding? Frightened and in doubt? Absolutely. We’re human you know! But Jesus doesn’t stop there, he says...

39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

(this verse of Him showing His wounds is not in every Luke source-manuscript but the same scene is in John 20: and in John it also says... When he had said this, he **breathed on them** and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”**)

Remember that “received the Holy Spirit as we pause here a minute and look back at how Jesus was **prepared** to start His ministry.

Picture a man wearing clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:6-8)

This particular day, he’s standing waist deep in the river and Jesus had come from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan. And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (Mark 1:9-12)

We don’t know when Jesus’ mind was opened to the intimate knowledge of the scriptures. We don’t know when He knew that he was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ.

But, we do know that after baptism the Spirit descended on Him and a voice from heaven called Him “My Son”. We also know that back in Luke 2 the story recounts Mary and Joseph, His parents found him in the Temple in Jerusalem, at the age of 12, “... sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers. He told his parents “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:46-49)

Back in the upper room, after Jesus had suddenly appeared after death, he did as John the Baptist said, he baptized the Apostles with the Holy Spirit.

41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

Would a ghost do that? Should there be any doubt now that he was alive, standing before them? And then, to prove it even further...

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, (2x)

Matthew Henry was a pastor and theologian in the late 16, early 1700s still studied by most pastors today. From 1708-10, he wrote a 6 volume Commentary of the entire bible. The old English is hard but I'll translate what he said about Verse 45: What he said was that Christ works on our minds to open them to understand Him and this is best accomplished by our studying and learning the scriptures."¹

Continuing with Verse 46...

46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

48 You are witnesses of these things.

Jesus closed here by summarizing, that now that their minds had been opened to a full understanding of the scriptures, that they saw the plan for salvation through Him as a trail, weaving all the way through the Biblical writings; that they were the witnesses of the truth and they, uniquely, were to take that truth to all the nations.

In our ongoing Disciple bible study, we are studying and learning God's word by digging into His book; tearing at the seams between stories and looking for the markers along the trail from Genesis all the way to Jesus and to His redemption for us on the cross.

Some of those markers look like these:

Psalm 4:3 from our reading today says: "*.... know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself...*"

And to be faithful Joshua 1:8 says: *This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written.*

And in Jesus time He said – "*They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.*" (John 14: 21)

These trail markers help Disciples like us to know that we are set apart, to know that the Bible is God's instruction to us, and to know that Jesus' commandments are a reflection of God's love for us.

¹ Found on <http://biblehub.com/luke/24-45.htm>. Accessed 4/12/18. From Matthew Henry Commentary on Luke 24:36-49.

There were, as I said earlier, 4 character examples who had their minds opened to the scriptures we're working through today. You have met 3 of them so far.

There was Cleopas and his fellow disciple on the road to Emmaus, there was Jesus himself, there were the 11 disciples in the upper room, and the last was the final Apostle, Paul.

Each of these share 4 things in common, they were all in a place of isolation or desolation, God's plan was opened to them, they were Baptized with the Holy Spirit, and they went from there to preach and teach to the nations.

In Luke 24, Cleopas and companion were walking a desolate road in great sorrow and Jesus led them through the scriptures and the Spirit made their hearts burn. They then returned to tell their story to the Apostles and helped spread the word to the nations.

Also in Luke 24, The Apostles were in a locked room, hiding out in sorrow after the crucifixion and Jesus appeared and filled their minds with knowledge of the scriptures, breathed a Baptism of Holy Spirit into them, and declared for them to proclaim His name to all nations.

During Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and he was driven into the desert for 40 days of fasting and testing. When he returned, Jesus began to preach, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" (Mat 4:17)

And in the Apostle Paul's case, he met the risen Jesus on a 135-mile trip through the desert wilderness to Damascus, then spent 3 days in total blindness, and then was filled by the Holy Spirit and Baptized and began to preach.

These are the 4 founders of our faith. They all received a miraculous revelation of the truth of God's Holy word and were given knowledge, baptism by the Spirit, and a life-long mission to spread the word of Jesus to all nations.

So what? You might say – they were set apart by God for service, very few if any of us will experience the Holy Spirit opening the scriptures to us, even if we feel set apart for service, so how are we to proceed? Where are we to go and what are we to do as we follow this trail of words in the scriptures?

Well, do you remember the bear?

Our path is learned through **experience and repetition.**

You may have heard Pastor Wayne or his wife Julie talk about their habit of reading through the bible diligently every year. I remember my mom's Bible, an old King James with some tattered edges and notes slipped in between many pages. I don't remember her reading it a lot, but it had seen many miles and had many years of use and she was a diligent person of faith. **Experience and repetition.**

I leave you with 2 biblical hints for following the scriptural trail, directly from those whose minds were opened, and then, a closing story.

The Apostle Peter, one of the 11 in the upper room and the first Bishop and Pope of the early church, said *—Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct...*” (1 Pet 1: 13-16)

And the Apostle Paul said: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Romans 12:2)

I'll close with an old English story: Several years ago, a reader of *The British Weekly News* wrote this provocative letter to the editor:

"Dear Sir, it seems clergy feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending a church quite regularly for the past 30 years, and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered that I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a priest's time might be more profitably spent on something else?
Sincerely . . X . "

For weeks a real storm of editorial responses ensued. The uproar finally was ended by this letter:

"Dear Sir, I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals--- mostly of my wife's cooking. Suddenly, I have discovered that I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I received nourishment from every single one of them. I have the distinct impression that without them I would have starved to death long ago. Sincerely, . . Y.²

Follow the trail of words - set down for our instruction - day by day -and it will nourish and strengthen you for God's service. Amen

² A Servant's Song, Michael B Hobbs, 2008, pg 143, Lulu Publishing, Morrisville NC