

Southport Presbyterian Church

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Rev. June Barrow

A Surprise Ending

Luke 24:13-35

Roger Gale is one of our long time members. He was an art teacher at Southport High School for years and is an artist. With his permission, I tell you this story he recently told me.

Roger attended an art show held at a beautiful Catholic monastery in southern Indiana. He said the religious community living there help support themselves by hosting fish and chips dinners for which they are well known in the area. Roger was there for one of the dinners, said it was delicious, and asked if her might go back into the kitchen to see how the operation is run. He was directed down a hallway and through a door. There he saw a man in a brown robe, standing in front of a large vat, stirring. He asked, "Are you the fish fryer?" And the man replied, "No, I am the chip monk."

The same thing happened to me that just happened to you. I was listening to Roger with attention and sensitivity, thinking I knew where this journey was going, and then there was a surprise ending. We are going to read a story with a surprise ending. Are you ready?

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his

glory?”²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

These are two ordinary people. Cleopas and his companion are no one we have ever heard of before or after – ordinary people nobodies who have no idea what God might be doing. They could be any one of us. They are on an ordinary every day walk. We never hear of Cleopas again after this passage, and we never learn the name of his companion. They are ordinary people who are followers of Jesus. As they think about what has happened, their faces are downcast. They are sad.

We meet them having a Good Friday moment. There is so much to make us sad in this world. And aren't we obligated, as Christians, to look right at all the suffering and sadness and heartbreak and sin in the world? Aren't we supposed to stand with the suffering, look all the sorrow square in the face, engage the darkness in this fallen world? Don't we have to care? Shouldn't we hurt with the hurting, suffer with the suffering? Doesn't the church live in Good Friday?

Here's how one man describes his encounter with this. He'd been at a three day long church conference. He says:

*We'd been working for three days – struggling with depleted resources.... We were preparing to end the meeting and head home when a dreadfully earnest participant grabbed the microphone. “I think it sad,” she said, “that in three days there hasn't been mention of the horrible tragedy of landmines in Iraq.” A sigh arose in the room... an already deflated meeting rolled over and died. Look at us. We were so busy eradicating killer diseases, curing malaria, raising \$3million to solve AIDS, funding pensions of suffering African pastors, and sending water purification systems to Haiti that we missed the one good work that could have certified us as a church that really, really cares. (William Willimon, in *The Christian Century*, April, 2010)*

Good Friday. Is that where the church lives? Well, let's get a witness from a country that has suffered plenty. Let's go to Haiti. Recall the earthquake in January. Here's what one writer describes: “As darkness fell upon Port-Au-Prince after the earth heaved that January night,

people danced in the streets and sang hymns. On CNN, Anderson Cooper was incredulous.” (William Willimon, cited above)

Many of you who have been on mission trips to countries we consider poorer than ours have seen this: Children laugh and play and sing loudly. Don't they know they are miserable? Don't they know their life expectancy isn't as long as those of children in other places? Don't they know that in other countries children have far more material goods? What do we make of their singing and their joy? What do we make of many Haitian Christians out in the street the day after an earthquake dancing together and singing hymns?

Friends, Good Friday really happened – there was injustice, and a crucifixion, and death, and confusion, and pain and loss. And there is plenty of that in our world, in our lives, maybe right in your own life. But that was not the end of the story. That is not the end of the story. The end of the story is resurrection, new life, a surprise ending, a new beginning, joy where there was sorrow.

Let's go back to Scripture. As these two people walk along the road together, sharing a Good Friday memory, Friday feelings, Friday worries, Friday confusion, here comes Jesus. First he asks them how they are and they tell them. Then he offers them two things: First, it's the Word. **²⁶“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**

He tells them from scripture that all the troubling and painful events they have experienced are within God's view, within God's care, within God's power. Then he goes home with them and breaks the communion bread.

And here is that part of the story. **³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”**

When Jesus gave them the Word, their hearts burned. When he gave them the bread, the sacrament of communion, their eyes were opened and they could see who Jesus was and is. The Word and the Sacrament. Did you know that among all Presbyterians, no matter which particular group, pastors are “Ministers of the Word and Sacrament.” That's the heart of our worship. We read and study and proclaim the Word of God. And it is our authority. We share the sacraments. In our tradition, there are two. Some of you are from a Roman Catholic background, and you know that among our Catholic brothers and sisters, there are seven sacraments, including in addition to communion and baptism, confirmation, ordination, confession, marriage and others. We would all agree that they are all sacred moments and great blessings, but do you know we pull out two of those – communion and baptism and call them sacraments, or especially sacred events? It's because Jesus did them and Jesus commanded us to do them. Jesus was baptized and at the end of Matthew he said: “Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Jesus instituted Communion at the last supper on the

very night he was arrested and he commanded that we should share communion as a witness to what the Lord did for us in his crucifixion. Both sacraments, baptism and communion, are about death and resurrection, about Good Friday and Easter. In Romans chapter 6, it says: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." It's dying and a rising, death and resurrection, Good Friday and Easter morning. Both sacraments point us to these events, because they are the heart of Christian faith, the center of the gospel, the point of human history, and they are the great plan of God for his glory and for our good.

As Cleopas and his companion did, let us meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread.