

But then other rumors began to trickle in. The great stone has been moved from the mouth of Jesus' tomb. His body is missing. Angels were there. Mary Magdalene says she saw Jesus alive. Peter and John investigated the scene at the cemetery and are talking about burial cloths being strewn around and about one being neatly folded.

These rumors elicited a number of emotional responses. Again there was fear, but this fear was of a different sort; the kind that gives one the "holy shivers," the fear of the unknown. These rumors brought uncertainty, doubt in a positive sense, and with the doubt—a glimmer of hope. Nevertheless, the discouraged followers of Jesus needed more than rumors.

In our gospel lesson from Luke 24:13-16 we read: *"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him."*

These two disciples are so preoccupied and so focused on their loss that they hardly notice the man who comes up behind them and now walks along with them. "What are you talking about," he asks them. "Man, where have you been?" they answer. "Have you just got here and haven't yet heard about Jesus and what they did to Him--how they took Him prisoner and sentenced Him to death and crucified him? Haven't you heard that he was sealed in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb and that now His body has disappeared?" "We thought He was our Messiah but He's been dead three days and we don't know what to do." "The other disciples are confused and disorganized, bewildered and pointing the finger at each other's failures. The authorities are probably after all of us. If they have gone so far as to dispose of His dead body, it's hard to tell what they will do to us. We waited around as long as we could but we figured the safest thing to do now would be to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible.

After Cleopas and the other disciple had been given the opportunity to pour out their grief and fear, the one who had come to accompany them began to speak. It turned out that he was a teacher, a holy man of some kind, who knew much about Jewish scripture. And, he taught them from scripture. He taught them that the prophets had predicted

the rejection, sufferings, and death of the Messiah, and that after his death the Messiah would enter into his glory.

How the time flew by when this man spoke to them and taught them. It was soon evening and time to stop for supper and find lodging for the night. They invited their fellow traveler to stay with them. Somehow with him along things didn't seem so bleak. Soon they were at the table beginning their dinner. Their invited guest, who had been teaching them, now took the lead. He raised the bread and broke it. And, all of a sudden, they really looked at him and saw Him for the first time and realized that it was not the first time. Now they knew why the tomb of Jesus was empty. The answer was reclining at the table with them, breaking bread with them! The rumors of His resurrection were real.

Luke then tells us that Jesus disappeared from their sight, but it didn't matter. A fire had been ignited in their hearts. Luke 24:32 says, *"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?'"* Verse 33 shows us the change this encounter with Jesus wrought within them. *"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together. . . ."*

It didn't matter that it was evening; it didn't matter that they were physically exhausted; it didn't matter that it could be dangerous. Their hope was renewed. They had a wonderful message to deliver. This unexpected turn of events sent them off in a whole new direction. The greatest adventure of their lives was not ended; it was just beginning!

I wonder this morning what rumors you have heard concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Have you heard that He is still alive and that He can be experienced by all who will believe in Him? Have you heard that He loves you? Have you heard that through His sacrifice, God has forgiven your sins? Have you heard that if you turn the reigns of your life over to Him, He will bring new meaning, purpose, and power to your life? Have you heard that He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask for Him, and that He will bring love, joy, peace and a number of other good things into your life? Have you heard that He promises to be with you forever, to never leave you or forsake you?

And then I would ask you another question: Have you found the

rumors to be real? Rumors, even good rumors, can only take us so far. They can spark some hope, raise expectations, delay our decisions to give up. But what we need is reality. We need to know that our living Lord is alive in us and that His presence makes a real difference. We need to know that we can pray and expect answers to our prayers. We need to experience His forgiveness and cleansing of our sins. We need to feel His gift of everlasting life percolating within us.

I think I might have told you this once before, but my dad had an outgoing personality. He liked to entertain people and at times could be quite the comedian. To entertain us children and to embarrass our mom, dad would sometimes run around the house mimicking the sound of a coffee pot and claiming to be a percolator. Well, we need to experience the life of the Holy Spirit percolating within us.

That would be one way of describing what happened to the Emmaus Road disciples and all the others, once they encountered the risen Lord. They began to percolate with new hope, new purpose, and new life. **All of us are meant to become percolators for Jesus.**

The question for this morning is this: How do we get there? How can the rumors of the resurrection of Jesus Christ become real in each of our lives?

When we go back and revisit the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it seems to me that we can pick up some important clues on how to move forward, how to position ourselves to experience the reality that we long for. First of all, we need to establish some space. The Emmaus road disciples took a walk; **they got out of town.**

The problem with many of us, and many of us moderns in particular, is that every moment of our lives is stuffed full of activity, noise, other people clamoring for attention. The television, radio and "smart" phones are making us deaf and numb to the still small voice of God. Sometimes we need to get out of the city, away from the crowd, away from our usual hectic schedules and constant activities. We need to make time to make friends again with some of our childhood playmates, friends again with the clouds and stars in the sky, with the flowers and trees, with the birds and yes, even the bees. God gave us nature for a sanctuary; we need to make use of it.

Think of those in the Bible whom God told to get up and get moving. Think of Abraham & Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Jonah and the whole people of Israel. God led them into the wilderness to show them His presence. Even Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. To begin or to refresh our spiritual journeys we need to get out of town, take a long walk in the right direction.

A second thing we can learn from the disciples on the Emmaus road is that they had a conversation. Even before Jesus showed up, they were talking with one another about the things that had happened. They were reflecting on their past and present, and wondering about their future. This is why we need to get some distance from the ordinary experiences of our lives. We need to spend some time in honest reflection. As scary as it might be, we need to take inventory of our lives. In the light of our present circumstances, we need to ask the questions: "What does it all mean?" and "What is God trying to get through to me?"

It is also important to find a spiritual confidant, someone to bounce ideas off of, someone who can help us to accurately assess what we are trying to say, someone to hold us accountable, and someone who can affirm and verify our experience. We need to get out of town and begin or renew our spiritual conversation. **We need to talk.**

A third and crucial thing we can learn from the Emmaus road disciples is that we need to listen to the words of the Master. I don't know what anyone's personal opinion of the Bible might be, but if we want validation for the rumor of the Lord's resurrection from the dead, there is no substitute for spending time reading and meditating on the word of God. The Emmaus road disciples testify to us with these words, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*" If we want to "feel the burn" and have the Living Lord percolating within us, we need to give Him the opportunity to speak to us through His book. I believe that if we read it prayerfully, Jesus will explain the scriptures to us, just as He explained them to the travelers we meet in Luke 24.

The fourth thing we learn from the Emmaus road disciples that is instructive for us is that they invited Jesus, even before they knew it was Jesus, to come and stay with them. They weren't sure who this stranger was who had joined them on the road and who made their

hearts come alive as He explained to them the scriptures, but whoever He was they knew they wanted more of Him. So they invited Him to stay with them. If we make time to be with Jesus, feed on His words, and invite Him to be with us, He will be with us and make Himself known to us. **What we've only known as rumors will become real.**

If we want to move from rumors of the Resurrection to the reality of the Resurrection, we need to get out of town, take a long walk, have a conversation with a spiritual confidant, listen carefully to the word of God, and invite Jesus to come and stay with us. And although that may sound like enough, it isn't. There is one thing more. Luke 24:33-35 says of the Emmaus road disciples: "*They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.'* then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."

To go from rumors to reality and for our spiritual renewal to be complete, we need to connect or reconnect with other believers and testify to what we've experienced. The apostle Paul puts it this way in Romans 10:9 & 10, "*That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*"

For rumors of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave to become and to remain real to us, we must give voice to our experiences with Him. **We need to tell the story.** Knowing the story is not enough because this story, His story, is meant to become our story. And, it only becomes our story when we tell it from our own experiences and in our own words. So get out of town, reflect on your life's circumstances, bounce it off a friend, listen to God's word, invite Jesus to stay with you, come back and tell us what the Lord has done. Don't rest your hope on rumors of His resurrection. Pursue the Lord until it's real.

The Fourth Street Church of God

4thstcog.com

2001 Fourth Street
Altoona, PA 16601
942-1007/946-4110

Sermon for April 30, 2017

When the Rumor Becomes Real

Luke 24:13-25

Jon R. Neely, Pastor
neelyjon@gmail.com

When the Rumor Becomes Real

Before Easter Sunday had become Easter Monday, rumors were popping up like dandelions in my back yard. At first, there were only negative rumors, rumors of potential raids against the followers of Jesus. These rumors drove the main body of disciples to closet themselves behind locked doors for fear of their enemies. These rumors drove other disciples to get out of town, to get away from Jerusalem as quickly as possible.