

Life is a journey.

Life is a journey that is filled with highs and lows – heartbreak and healing – devastation and restoration – hunger and fulfillment.

Life is often a cyclical journey – taking us away and bringing us back.

Life is a journey we do not have to make alone.

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I'd like us to look at today's Gospel lesson – the story of two friends leaving Jerusalem, walking to Emmaus, and then returning to Jerusalem – as an allegory for all of life's journeys.

The story takes place on Easter. Two of Jesus' friends.... followers...Cleopas and an unnamed friend have decided to leave Jerusalem where so many horrible events took place and walk to the town of Emmaus....about 7½ miles away.

The Bible doesn't tell us the exact reason they left Jerusalem, but we can imagine there is nothing left for them there. They want to escape their disappointment, sorrow, pain, and loss. They meet a stranger on their travels and discuss Jesus' arrest, torture, crucifixion, and death. They had hoped Jesus was the one – the Messiah – but now he's dead.

They had hopes and expectations that weren't met. They are devastated and not sure what they will do next. What does life hold for them now that their reason – their cause – is gone?

They heard some rumors that Jesus' tomb was empty, but that couldn't be. Many followers dismissed the proclamations of their female friends to be “idle tales.”

Cleopas and his friend go to Emmaus. We're not told an exact reason they picked this village. But anywhere is better than staying in Jerusalem. They probably want to escape the pain of the city that took away their main reason for living.

We all know that we can't run away from our problems. Changing our location doesn't change the things going on in our lives. So, traveling to Emmaus isn't an escape, but a journey toward something new.

What Cleopas and his friend don't realize is that their escape is actually a hunger – a hunger for fulfillment – a hunger for life – a hunger for wholeness. They have lost so much. Going to Emmaus isn't an escape but rather a search for more.

Like all of us, they hunger for life, love, wholeness, community, purpose. That must be the reason they ask the stranger to not continue his journey but to stay and have dinner with them. They are hungry to fill the emptiness inside of them after Jesus' death.

This stranger breaks bread with them....and they realize it is Jesus. Why they didn't know it was Jesus before is anyone's guess. They were blinded by their grief. Maybe they were caught up in their own troubles. But Jesus breaks the bread and they see that all is not lost. There he is. There is Jesus. The person they had always hoped would lead them has returned to help them heal.

They were broken. And now they see that there is a possibility that they can heal – that they can become whole again. Their brokenness is not the end – but the ability to begin.

As the saying goes, when you hit rock bottom, the only way to go is up.

Fr. Michael Marsh puts it this way in his commentary on this scripture about traveling to Emmaus. "These friends were hungry for a new life and Jesus fed them not just by breaking bread, but with himself: with his body, his life, his love, his compassion, his strength, his forgiveness, his hope, with all that he is and all that he has. Their life was being restored by being broken open."

These disciples had seen all of these qualities in Jesus before his crucifixion. And now they were reminded of it all upon his return and his gracious hospitality.

But once Cleopas and friend recognize Jesus, he vanishes from their sight. But he isn't gone. He's now living inside of them. That is the reason for the trip to Emmaus. The disciples weren't escaping their pain and the horror of the events in Jerusalem, they are finding themselves and Jesus all over again.

So, now on the way to healing and wholeness, Cleopas and his traveling companion return to Jerusalem to tell every one of their amazing encounter with Jesus – and of the beginning of their return to wholeness. There, they learn that Jesus is indeed alive and others have seen him, too.

Jerusalem is the same city it was before. But renewed by the journey toward healing, Jerusalem is not only a place of sadness, but a place where joy can grow – not just a place of death, but a place of new life – not just a place of loss, but a place of possible new beginnings.

Life is a journey. Jerusalem. Emmaus. Jerusalem.

Life is a journey that is filled with highs and lows – heartbreak and healing – devastation and restoration – hunger and fulfillment. Jerusalem. Emmaus. Jerusalem.

Life is often a cyclical journey – taking us away and bringing us back. Jerusalem. Emmaus. Jerusalem.

Life is a journey we do not have to make alone. Cleopas. A friend. A stranger. Jesus.

Life is a journey. Not often an easy journey. But a journey we know we can manage.

Today, I'd like each of us to think about where we are...right now...on our particular journey.

Jerusalem – the place that has done us in. The place we must leave in order to put the pieces back together.

The road – the place where we can think and discuss our deepest fears with friends and strangers

Emmaus – the place where our hunger for wholeness is realized and fulfilled with the help of others.

Back to Jerusalem – where we put our lives back together and share it with others.

Where are you today?

Are you leaving Jerusalem? In Emmaus? On the way? Returning to Jerusalem?
In what ways has your life been shattered? Is it in pieces today?

Are you mourning the loss of a loved one? The end of the relationship? A
lack luster job? A retirement with little planned?

What are you running from today? This moment?

Addiction? A past mistake? A difficult situation you can't get out of?
What is your deepest hunger? What are you running toward?

Love? Acceptance? Validation? Solitude?

What is your Jerusalem today? Is it a place of sorrow and loss or is it a place of life
and restoration?

Your home? Your family? St. Mark's?

Where is your Emmaus? What do you need from Emmaus today?

A hike in the mountains? A visit to a long-lost relative or friend? A
sabbatical? A smile and a hug? Time alone to think?

Life is a journey. God is with us every step we take on that journey. And just as
Cleopas and his friend encountered the living Jesus without knowing it, we do the
same thing every single day. God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit – are among us all the
time – everywhere we go. You don't have to recognize them, you just have to be
open to what they have to say. Listen. And feel that burning in your heart.

Life is a journey from one place....looking for a new place...looking to be made
new...and returning home again in one form or another.

Pack light. Be open to listening to friends and strangers. Drink plenty of water.
Wear sunscreen.

Life is a journey. Travel without fear because God is with us to make us whole.

