

“NOW We Believe!”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, April 11, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

Scripture Text:

Luke 24:13-35 [NLT]

OPENING

(*Some reflection on “*the unbelievable*” becoming “*the undeniable*” with each encounter with Jesus in the Scriptures.*)

This is no different for us today: We need encounters with Jesus, too, to help us make the transition from “*unbelievable*” to “*undeniable*”. And we might see in the story from Luke’s Gospel this morning a pattern of those encounters for ourselves.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

Fascinating teaching from Joel Green, PhD re: revelation and Jesus’ *interpreting* the Scriptures for these two disciples – not quoting them – concerning Himself. (<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/meeting-jesus-on-the-road-to-emmaus-luke-24/>).

“What has happened with Jesus can be understood only in light of the Scriptures, yet the Scriptures themselves can be understood only in the light of what has happened with Jesus. These two are

mutually informing.” (Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT p 844)

“The Scriptures” are the Scriptures of Israel – the “Old Testament” – which could include portions of the Apocrypha via the LXX.

SERMON THOUGHTS



Two powerful artistic interpretations of the significance of the events in this story: the first, above, by 19th century Swiss landscape painter, Robert Zund.

[Interestingly, a copy of this painting is hanging in our Parlor here at FUMC – I never realized until preparing for this sermon that it was by a well-known artist!]

This is *revelation*, which is why the hearts of the two burned within them. And yet, as powerful as the time on the road with Jesus was – i.e., his interpretation of the Scriptures for the two of them – His “revelation”

was limited to His opening their eyes to the understanding of the Scriptures only. It wasn't until later that evening during the breaking of their bread together that their eyes were opened to His "real presence" (a Eucharistic term) among them.

This is depicted in the second of the two paintings, this one by the 17th century Italian master, Caravaggio:



In each case, it's encounter with Jesus that leads them toward faith and trust in Him. As with Anna's Children's Message, it's the puzzle pieces being put into place that reveals the larger image – the whole.

BACK TO THE SCRIPTURES

Important to finish the story of the end of this first Easter day: Luke 24:36-49. Here again, we're talking encounter with Jesus that transforms the "unbelievable" to the "undeniable".

Interestingly, the closing verses of this story in Luke (24:36-40) compare well with John 20:19-25: Jesus' appearing to the rest of the gathering (except for Thomas(?), cf. John 20:24). It is even alluded to in the disputed "longer ending" of Mark's Gospel at Mark 16:12-13.

CONCLUSION / TRANS to COMMUNION

Jesus' revealing of Himself to us today – "unbelievable"? – is just as invigorating and just as needed as it has been throughout history, reaching back to this story at the end of Luke's Gospel (not to mention the similar point of revelation at Luke 4, with Jesus quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

Like the disciples, Jesus calls us to experience Him as the One the Scriptures point to. That's why the best of Christian theology understands Jesus, not the Bible, to be the living Word of God, the Bible, rather, being an indispensable and primary resource for pointing us to this Living Word.

And like the disciples, we are invited to encounter the real presence of Christ in our midst today in the breaking of the bread, our celebration of communion.

♪ Into Cohen's "Hallelujah" communion setting.

BENEDICTION

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus' revelation of Himself to His disciples took them by surprise. Even in His risen presence among them, the Gospels say they struggled with belief (cf. Luke 24:41, Matt. 28:17).

The question I would have us take into the week and ponder is this: Must Jesus continue to surprise *us* with His presence among us? That is, what must you and I do in our daily lives this week to be open to Jesus, so that when He does show up right in front of us, we are not shocked but overjoyed?

Let us go through the week doing what we can do for our own movement from “*Unbelievable!*” to “*Undeniable!*”. Amen.