

“Walking Witnesses: Road Etiquette”

Dr. Jay Howell

Luke 24:13-24

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Today our journey through the final chapter of Luke’s Gospel hits the road. In this Easter series “Walking Witnesses” we’re going bit by bit through Luke 24, looking at how the good news of Christ’s resurrection invites us to be on the move, that it’s a calling to live faith out, not just closed off unto ourselves. Last week, Mark guided us through the second half of the resurrection story, namely the first testimony of the resurrection of one apostle to another, that of the women’s testimony to the rest of the disciples and asked us what it could mean for doubt to play a role in a life of faith, or even how being doubted, as the women were, could play a role too.

Today we pick up where we left off, and Luke’s lens shifts quickly to a road winding through the hills westward a few miles west of Jerusalem. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ ¹⁹ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’

Luke 24:13-24

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me?

Almighty God, we thank you for how you come to us, meeting us in grief, in confusion, in hope, meeting us in ways we don’t see coming. We pray that you come to us anew this morning, speaking through your Word by your Spirit, and opening our eyes and ears, that we might know you more fully. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

The list of unspoken rules of etiquette while traveling are, I suppose by nature, unspoken, but we tend to keep them internally nonetheless. Having recently done a couple of transatlantic flights on the way to and from Israel last month, I had to brush up on my etiquette.

Some of the standard ones I didn't need a refresher course on. Courtesy to TSA and customs agents. Waiting your turn to board and deplane. Not being a "group" police. You know when you crowd around the gate as they're saying "Group 1, Group 2, Group 3," and you spend your time peaking at other people's passes and phones trying to catch the person sneaking on board early. That sort of thing. Those are easy. But then there are other matters on which there's some disagreement.

Bringing on smelly food from the airport. I get it; you're hungry and the connection was tight; but did you really have to stop to get that Chicken Curry Surprise instead of just a sandwich or a salad?

Taking your shoes off. I get it; it's a long flight, and the dogs are barking, so let them breathe a bit, but do we need to share that with everyone else? In fact at one spot, I saw as a rule *not* to put your feet on the armrest of the seat in front of you. I didn't realize that was in question.

Maintaining personal space. It's a crowded airplane, but how much space should you give the person in front of you in line. We flew with the boys last week, and whatever decorum there was Harry violated it, because as he was walking in front of me up the aisle of the plane, he definitely got right up into the business of the person in front of him, and he's all of this tall, so I mean right in their business.

And then there's armrest etiquette. If you have three across, who gets the armrests? Aisle and window seat have theirs on the edges, but what about the middle two armrests? Do you do the whole squatter's rights thing, first person to put their arm down gets it? Do you do the whole passive aggressive constant push to claim armrest territory? Or do you say, hey, middle seat gets both armrests? It's hard enough sitting middle.

But then there's perhaps the most hotly contested aspect of travel. Conversation. If you're sitting next to someone you don't know, how much conversation is too much to strike up with an unwitting, perhaps unwilling stranger? Sure you do the perfunctory "Good morning" when you sit down, but after that, how much do you dive into? For some, the answer's easy: "Well however much you want to talk!" And that sometimes means a trip-long talk that has no easy off ramp. For others, the answer's even simpler: "Well that's what you have headphones for." Are they plugged into anything? Well maybe they're just decoys, but they do the trick.

Often when I'm in that situation, sitting next to a stranger on the plane, and a conversation starts up—sometimes at my initiating, other times it's because I haven't gotten my headphones

quickly enough—there’s a threshold that gets crossed, when the question gets asked, “So what do you do?” Innocuous question, common question. But there’s always a bit of reaction when I say, “I’m a pastor.” For some, it’s a reaction of “Hey, no kidding, I go to such and such church,” and it’s a pleasant conversation about faith and church and that sort of thing. For others, though, once I say “I’m a pastor,” immediately I see them processing everything we had been talking about, and they’re trying to remember if they had said anything incriminating that they need to ask forgiveness for, like whatever cuss words they had let slip in the conversation up to that point, or the conversation turns—and this is probably my favorite form of this kind of exchange—turns to challenges they’ve had with faith, or what they used to believe but just can’t get behind anymore, or why they had fallen out with faith or the church or with Christians to begin with.

Point being, especially when it comes to travel etiquette and conversations with strangers, is you never know who you’re talking to.

Where we pick up the story in Luke, we have an instance of mistaken identity—or at least, hidden identity. Two disciples, only one of them named (Cleopas), are on the road toward a village named Emmaus, somewhere along a road heading westward away from Jerusalem through the Judean hill country. Why they were heading there, we don’t know. Maybe that’s where they were from, and after Jesus was killed, they figured, well guess we might as well go home.

But earlier that day they had heard some puzzling reports from women among their company who had gone to the tomb where Jesus had been buried, and then by others who also had gone to the tomb after the women had returned: reports that the tomb was empty, that Jesus was not there, but that the women reported a “vision of angels”—and interesting here that the disciples on the road suspected that the women had just had a “vision” of angels rather than actually being spoken to by an angel, but that’s another sermon—but that the women had reported that these angels had said that Jesus was alive.

It was with these snippets of news, nothing confirmed except that the tomb was empty, that went with these disciples on the road to Emmaus. And it’s noteworthy that in Luke’s telling of the resurrection, Jesus still has not appeared to anyone yet. (In other Gospels, Jesus first shows up at other points.) But as Luke tells it, as far as the listener, the reader is concerned, no one has actually set eyes on the risen Jesus yet. It’s all “Is he or is he not? And if he is, *where* is he?”

Jesus’ first appearance in fact takes place right here, on the Road to Emmaus. These two disciples are walking along, talking about everything that happened, until, Luke tells us, Jesus himself comes near to them and starts walking along with them, but they don’t recognize him. “Their eyes were kept from recognizing him,” it says.

So, I kind of wonder how that initial encounter went. Remember, they don't know it's Jesus, so from their perspective, they're walking along, then this random dude suddenly drops in and starts walking along with them and starts listening in. I wonder how that went over. You ever been walking along or going into a building, and you just happen to go in at the same time as someone else, and then you just happen to take the same turn in the hallway or at the same corner, and then you just happen to go to the same floor on the elevator. Anybody ever make up some reason to slow up or change direction just so the other person doesn't think you're following them? Anyone? Maybe it's just me.

But as far as they're concerned, this random guy just comes along and starts conversation about some pretty sensitive topics—remember, from the disciples' perspective, being known as one who followed Jesus was not exactly the safest thing to be known for right then. So when Jesus asks, “Hey so what have y'all been talking about?” there was every incentive for them to blow him off, “Buzz off creep, give us some distance.” Or if they were being a bit more polite, just saying they were talking about Jesus of Nazareth who had been killed in Jerusalem just a couple of days earlier, but not giving any indication that they were two of his followers, which could put them in hot water, potentially. So many ways they could have handled this encounter with this perfect stranger.

But instead of deflecting, they dive in deep. In v. 21, their words take a turn in particular. At first they just said they were talking about Jesus of Nazareth who had been handed over, but then they say, “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” By the end of it, they're not just saying what they were talking about, they were testifying to this stranger, testifying to the hopes they had, the hopes they had in this teacher they followed, one whom they hoped would be the Messiah, and then, hope against hope, there were whispers that perhaps against all odds he was alive after being killed.

The central irony of course is it's Jesus who's the audience of this testimony about himself, and that'll be revealed as we keep going. But something that's overlooked here often in this story of the Road to Emmaus is the courage it took for these disciples to share and testify as they did, because you may not always know who you're talking to, and you never know who might be listening.

In this series, we're talking about a so-called risen life, that is, a life led by the Spirit of Christ through his resurrection, and how it doesn't stay put, it doesn't keep things to itself. And

just in this one encounter, here's this model of bravery and hope even in conversation with a perfect stranger.

Do we consider faith in the same way, do we consider sharing faith in the same way? I'm not talking about standing on a street corner proselytizing, but do we consider how our words, words about faith, even with each other, might be overheard by someone else—often in unexpected ways?

A friend of mine, her name was Lindsay, years ago stopped in for a meal at a roadside diner—might've been a Waffle House, I forget. But she was there with a friend, both in college at the time, and they were both people of faith, and just over their meal, they talked about faith, about its challenges, its struggles, points of confusion, but also its blessings. And this made up the bulk of their conversation, just between the two of them.

As they near the end of their meal, a lady who had been sitting in the booth next to them, finished her meal, called over for the waiter, paid her bill, stood up, and came over to their table. She shared that she wasn't really the church-going type, but that she was so encouraged to hear young people grappling with faith and seeking to be a positive presence within the world. The lady then headed out, and Lindsay and her friend soon discovered the lady had paid for their meal too.

Not an earthshattering encounter, and a simple act of generosity on the lady's part too. Lindsay, as far as I know, never ran into that lady again. But in some way like that exchange on the Road to Emmaus, there was this testimony of sorts, shared with a perfect stranger. Now here's the part that sticks with me? What would have happened if the lady, overhearing them talk about faith and Jesus and all of that, and then also heard them being rude to the wait staff? What testimony would that have sounded like?

No way of knowing what happened with the lady who overheard them. No indication of any spiritual catharsis or conversion right there on the spot. But just a small encounter with followers of Jesus who spoke of their faith humbly and kindly, even just with each other.

We'll learn in coming weeks what that leads to in the case of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. What could it lead to for you?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.