

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – May 12, 2019

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

(Note: This text is NOT one of the given readings for this particular week in the Revised Common Lectionary. It was selected thematically to accompany Children's Ministry Sunday this week.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Luke 24:13-35 (From *Homiletics*; “Jesus, the Stranger, Guest, and Host”, May 4, 2014)

The account of the journey to Emmaus is as unique as it is ironic. Appearing only in the gospel of Luke, this pericope details the appearance of the risen Jesus to Cleopas and another unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus. The story is rich in irony as the readers are aware of Jesus' identity long before the disciples, and as the disciples' expectations of Jesus' significance are modified. In sum, the story makes for a delightful post-resurrection account of the risen Jesus.

The story opens as an imprecisely identified "two of them" journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The exact location of Emmaus is unknown today, and is further complicated by the textual-critical problem in verse 13 whereby some ancient manuscripts read "60 stadia" (roughly seven miles), and others read "160 stadia" (roughly 19 miles) from Jerusalem. Providing a precise geographic location for Emmaus is, however, beside the point. For Luke, who has been concerned with the centrality of Jerusalem throughout his gospel (e.g. 9:51, 53; 13:33-34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11), the movement *toward* Emmaus is probably not as significant as the movement *from* Jerusalem. In other words, Luke presents the picture of two disciples who are leaving the gospel's center stage to travel to its periphery, even if for a short time (cf. v. 33).

The introduction of Jesus in verse 15 inaugurates the irony that will permeate this account. The reader is told that the newcomer is Jesus, but verse 16 specifies that the disciples are not privy to this information. The passive construction here ("were kept from recognizing") may be a divine passive intended to imply that God is responsible for their initial ignorance. Though the picture of a deity who withholds knowledge may at first seem disturbing, it is, nonetheless, a biblical image that has precedent in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10) and the intentional confounding of Isaiah's audience (Isaiah 6:9-10). In any case, given that the disciples will not remain in their ignorance for long (cf. v. 31), even if divine agency is the cause of their initial blindness, it hardly presents the most troubling picture of God in all of biblical literature.

Following Jesus' query about their discussion in verse 17, Cleopas continues the story's irony by asking Jesus, the one character who would have first-hand knowledge of what had just happened in Jerusalem, if he is the only one who remains unaware of these events. The following exchange between Jesus and Cleopas continues the irony as Jesus, the one who knows, asks a short question (only a single word in the Greek, *ποια*) which is met by a lengthy reply (vv. 19-24) from Cleopas, the one who does not even know to whom he is speaking. Cleopas' explanation in verses 20-21 suggests that he is under the impression that, due to Jesus' death, Jesus was not the one for whom Cleopas and others had hoped. The hope that Jesus is the one to redeem Israel (v. 21) was introduced early on in the gospel as Zechariah praised God for the redemption of Israel (1:68), and as the prophetess Anna proclaims Jesus to those who are searching for similar redemption (2:38).

Again, the gospel's audience is aware of what its characters are not. The irony of the situation here in Cleopas' speech is that, in fact, it was precisely through Jesus' death that he was revealed to be the one who was hoped for all along. This point becomes all the more clear as Jesus rebukes Cleopas for his ignorance (v. 25), and explains that the Messiah's suffering is necessary for his glory (v. 26). (Jesus' question here in Greek is worded so as to expect a positive answer: "Yes, it was necessary ...") This sentiment, too, is dripping with irony, insofar as no one would ever expect that suffering and glory should be so closely intertwined.

The conversation is brought to a close in much the same way as it opened. Just as a summary statement opened the dialogue (vv. 13-16) so, too, does a summary statement close it (v. 27). Verse 28 finds the travelers having arrived at their destination. Jesus' seemingly odd intent to go on (v. 28) may be explainable on the basis of ancient Middle Eastern hospitality practices. Proper etiquette dictated that a guest should refuse service or hospitality from a host several times. Only after the host had repeatedly insisted on the invitation was the guest expected to accept. Thus, it could be that verse 28 implies an initial rejection of an unstated invitation that is only accepted finally in verse 29.

The narration in verses 30-31 serves to offer the reader of the story a similar experience as the characters within it. There is no recorded speech of Jesus in these verses, and so the reader is privy only to his actions which have the effect of making him known to the disciples. Here in verse 31, a passive verb indicates the disciples' access to insight ("their eyes were opened"). This could simply be an expression, or it may again, as in verse 16 previously, be meant as a divine passive.

The return trip to Jerusalem in verse 33 brings the disciples back to the central location of Luke's gospel. Just as Luke described Jesus as setting his face to go to Jerusalem (9:51) in order that the significant events of Jesus' crucifixion and death could be carried out in that significant geographic locale, so, too, does Luke now describe the disciples as returning to this central location in order that they might begin the spreading of the good news from there, a process that will be described in depth in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

As a whole, this pericope is chock full of irony. The audience is granted insight that its characters only gradually obtain, and the knowledge about the significance of Jesus' death is itself ironic. It is only through suffering that the Messiah is able to achieve glory (v. 26). If the pericope's characters are confused, then it only mirrors a similar confusion that may be experienced by the story's audience who must also come to grips with the backwards logic that this idea implies.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for this text (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

Reflection Questions on Luke 24:13-35

- 1.** Why do you think these two travelers were unable to recognize Jesus? Had they not actually met him prior to this meeting? Had Jesus' appearance changed in some significant way? Was their "blindness" due to some divine mandate, as v. 16 might suggest? Had their own hardheartedness or lack of faith made it impossible for them to recognize Jesus, as some commentators have suggested? Was his "appearance" of a more spiritual than physical/historical nature? What do you think? Does it matter in how you think about the story?
- 2.** Some great questions to ponder from Robert Hoch, *workingpreacher.org* (April 30, 2017): "*What does it mean to meet the resurrection on the road, as a stranger, when we are between places and perhaps beside ourselves? What are the ethical dimensions of this text, especially the encounter with Jesus as a "stranger in a strange land"? Do we take this "resurrection" -- this homeless one -- into our homes?* How might the story of this encounter enlighten our concepts and practices of hospitality, especially in the "messiness" of real life?
- 3.** Does this story have something to teach about the distinction between discourse *about* Jesus and communion *with* Jesus?
- 4.** Why was the breaking of bread the moment in which Jesus was recognized? And why did Jesus vanish as soon as they recognized him?

What questions do you have?

What do you "wonder" about when reading these passages?