



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

April 12, 2015

"On Meeting Jesus"

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

Wasn't Easter a lot of fun? It was very special too because 119 people got baptized for the first time, and 142 reaffirmed their baptismal vows made a few or several years ago. That's 261 baptisms in total!

Our Easter music was also incredible. The kids' drama was amazing, fantastic, and phenomenal! We had more than 200 volunteers involved to make the Easter services be what they were.

So let's review the Easter story, to be ready for today's passage, which tells a story that happened just after the Resurrection. And for that review, what could be better than to have children recount the Easter story for us? Here are the two adopted children of the Mullen Family to tell us the Easter story. (The video "Mullen Family Easter Story" was shown.)

But what happens now after a great spiritual event like Easter where here in our church we saw people smiling, laughing, crying, teary-eyed, or excited? What do we do as we move from a highly emotional Easter service experience back to the routines of everyday life? Today's passage gives us insight as to what will keep us going with the spirit of Easter.

Luke 24:13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

Luke 24:14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

Luke 24:15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself came near and went with them,

Luke 24:16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.

Luke 24:17 And He said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.

Luke 24:18 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?"

Luke 24:19 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, Luke 24:20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be condemned to death and crucified Him.

Luke 24:21 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.

Luke 24:22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,

Luke 24:23 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.

Luke 24:24 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 24:25 Then He said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

Luke 24:26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

Luke 24:27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Luke 24:28 As they came near the village to which they were going, He walked ahead as if He were going on.

Luke 24:29 But they urged Him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them.

Luke 24:30 When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Luke 24:31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

Luke 24:32 *They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the scriptures to us?"*

Luke 24:33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.

Luke 24:34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and He has appeared to Simon!"

Luke 24:35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

May God bless the reading of His Word! Actually there's more to the story, and so I highly encourage you to later finish the chapter. There are just 14 verses left. It's such a wonderful story of how Jesus continues to amaze His disciples on top of the amazing fact that He was resurrected from the dead.

Over 200 people experienced Jesus in a new way last Easter weekend. And now the next step is to keep meeting with Him, talking to Him, listening to Him, and, even more importantly, following Him.

Trying to follow Jesus without a personal relationship with Him is like wanting a hamburger with no hamburger in it, or maybe a cheeseburger without cheese. It's choosing something but leaving out the main part.

Earlier this year while Pam and I were driving along in Southern California, we dropped by a fast food place, which I will not name. I rarely, rarely eat at fast food places but I had missed lunch, and it would take several hours to get to LAX. My experience there reminded me of why I don't eat at fast food places (unless

it is Zippy's).

So, I went in and said I would like a hamburger. Now this establishment is known for hamburgers. They have sold millions of hamburgers. But the person behind the counter said, "We don't sell plain hamburgers. What you want is a cheeseburger without cheese."

I looked around. I thought, "What? Am I on a hidden camera TV show?" Then I said, "No, I want a hamburger." And he said, "We don't sell plain hamburgers, but you can order cheeseburgers without cheese, unless you want a double burger."

I said, "You mean I can order a double burger with no cheese and you would sell that to me?" He said yes. "I mean like two burgers in one bun, and not two burgers with two buns?" He said yes.

So I made my order for one double burger, got it in a bag with French fries, and jumped into the car. As we drove off I opened up the bag with my mouth watering because I smelled the French fries.

But there wasn't one double burger, but two burgers separately wrapped. And lo and behold, here is what the wrapping of the burgers said: Cheeseburger without Cheese. (A picture of the label on the cheeseburger without cheese was shown.) What? I took a picture to prove it to you. I got a cheeseburger with no cheese!

My point today in telling you that story is that if you say you're a Christian but you don't have personal relationship with Jesus—which is a commitment to follow Him. It's sort of like ordering a cheeseburger without the cheese. You're leaving out the main part of what you're trying to go for. A cheeseburger cannot be a cheeseburger without cheese. That's what makes it a cheeseburger – the

cheese! And a Christian cannot be a Christian without Christ.

But more importantly, our faith is not about following the Christian or biblical principles; it's all about following Jesus. It's not about rules but a friendship with Jesus. Jesus is the cheese! Please don't quote me out of context, but you know what I mean!

It's about walking and talking with Jesus, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

When you get to know Jesus and start following Him, the Christian principles will make sense and you will willingly make them part of your life.

More than 200 people last Sunday had a spiritually transforming experience last Easter weekend as they came forward to be baptized or to renew their baptismal vows. But after such a spiritual high like that, it's easy to think that once the feeling is gone, Jesus is no longer with us, or that He's only present during emotionally charged experiences.

Let's look at our Bible story for today. Is it not interesting that these two disciples who were walking on the road DIDN'T KNOW that Jesus was walking with them? Is it possible that you can be with Jesus but not know you're with Him?

My first POINT is this: Jesus is with us in our every day life, so let us be ALERT in His presence and how He's working around us.

He's right there. He's right here. Don't be blind like Cleopas. Jesus is always with you whether it's Easter Sunday or just an ordinary day. That is what is so amazing about God. He is not way up there, but right close to us whether we feel it or not.

Sometimes we think that we need a real big spiritual experience in order to feel Jesus.

Yes, some people have dramatic encounters with our Lord, like during the baptisms last weekend. But I would say that for most people, experiences with Jesus are not as emotional or sensational. They're vanilla. They happen through the ordinary things in life. In our story, Jesus had been walking and talking and hanging out with Cleopas and the other disciple for a while before they realized they were with Jesus.

Jesus will come in lightning and thunder during the last days. But until then, He appears in the every day, talk story times. Jesus is in the ordinary. So be alert in seeing Him and feeling Him at work in our midst. How? By taking times of the day to be quiet and then really look, listen and observe what is happening around us. He is there. List what you are thankful for in that day and you will see Him.

The second point is this: Be careful of being disappointed in Jesus for all the wrong reasons.

In our Bible passage, we find Cleopas and the other disciple really bummed out because they thought Jesus was going to redeem Israel from the Romans, but then He died. They were greatly disappointed because they thought He was going to be this powerful military general-type of Messiah who would redeem them from the oppressive Romans.

Cleopas used the word "redeem" the wrong way. It was too shallow. The meaning he attached to it was too weak. Cleopas was only thinking in terms of military might. But when Jesus gets involved, redemption takes on a spiritual meaning that is FAR DEEPER and WIDER and GREATER!

It will be tempting to be disappointed in Jesus after Easter if you think Jesus is JUST going to redeem you from the boredom of

everyday living, or from sickness, or a terrible job, a difficult relationship, or an unfair situation.

When Jesus redeems, He redeems us spiritually so deeply that it doesn't matter if we are poor or sick, for we have Him in our lives. Being redeemed in Jesus means having a life of hope and joy in the midst of suffering, not apart from it. Jesus redeems us in far greater ways. He gives us purpose in life and redeems us from the things that enslave us, like money, sex, and power.

Some cynics say it is a leap of faith to believe in Jesus. But author Tim Keller says that it's a far greater leap of faith to think that life is better without the resurrection of Jesus. We are in big trouble if we think that we don't need Jesus. It is a far greater leap of faith for us to believe that having money, power, popularity, drugs, or sex is the key to having a restored life.

Here's a thought: Any worldly crutch that we use to redeem ourselves actually can enslave us.

Here's how that works. People who use cocaine to give them a charge in life later find out that cocaine enslaves them. People who use money to buy friends or sees money as the source of all joy, become enslaved to money. People who believe self-esteem is based on accomplishments become enslaved to work and to working long hours. People who think that popularity is the key to life get enslaved to people-pleasing.

Whatever it is that we're using to try to redeem ourselves, we become enslaved to it. Only Jesus truly redeems and frees us. He is not just risen but RISEN INDEED!

Now check this out: I find it really interesting that Cleopas and his

friend only recognized Jesus when Jesus broke bread with them. Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, distributed it. Perhaps, they remembered Jesus doing that very same thing once before – in the feeding of the 5,000, when He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and distributed it. It was the same at the last supper. Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and then distributed it. Same pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing the bread.

And hear this – this is what Jesus does with us: He takes us, blesses us, but then breaks us, and then uses us. He takes us, blesses us, breaks us, and uses us.

How does He take us?

He chose us. When we were knitted in our mother's wombs. He chose us, like an adoptive parent, and that is how the Bible describes it. He adopted us into His family. If we have had the imperfect parent, He adopts us as the perfect parent we have always wanted. The Bible says we are heirs of His immense inheritance. We are his children.

How does He bless us?

He promises that His Holy Spirit will enter into us. He blesses us with His joy and grace and mercy and spiritual gifts, and we can see blossoming in our lives the fruit of His spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

How does He break us?

He doesn't break us as a cynical God who desires to hurt us. Like, I think I will break his arm today just to be mean. No, God is like a loving surgeon who might break our skin so that He can heal an internal organ.

Or like how a good physician at times re-breaks an arm to reset it to heal more properly. It's called "fracture reduction" or commonly as "resetting a fracture."

What God is most interested in is taking our broken lives and resetting it, and yes, sometimes manipulating the broken parts so that we will heal more properly. If you don't put your arm in a cast then it can grow twisted and deformed. Same for our lives. We need the cast of Christ to help reset our lives straight and true spiritual fracture reduction!

God also desires to remove pride from our lives. He will allow us to be broken so that we will let go of our pride, so we can see that we are not gods, or so we will not follow false gods, because He is truly the only God in this world.

Let me read to you a passage from the Old Testament of the Bible that shows how much God wants to break our pride for our own good, and how dangerous it is to live a prideful life, individually or as an entire community.

Let's listen and take heed to these words of the Lord to the ancient country of Israel who often turned its back on God who said to them:

"I'll break your strong pride: I'll make the skies above you like a sheet of tin and the ground under you like cast iron. No matter how hard you work, nothing will come of it: No crops out of the ground, no fruit off the trees. If you defy Me and refuse to listen, your punishment will be seven times more than your sins." (Lev. 26:19-21 The Message)

Okay, I get it. That is why we need to acknowledge there is only one God who is greater than any government, any leader, any

philosophy, or any of the things that enslave us, and why we need to follow Him! Who wants a life without God? Kind of like a cheeseburger without cheese! It's not the real thing.

It says in Proverbs 16:5 in the Bible that pride is an abomination to Him. And that *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)*

I don't know about you, but I don't want to live a life of pride where the Almighty God is always opposing me!

So God takes us, blesses us, sometimes breaks us, and God uses us.

How does God use us?

In lots of different ways. He sends us to different places locally or in other parts of the world to tell others about the salvation He offers. When He uses us, there is nothing more wonderful than being in the gulfstream of God, where we use our God-given gifts for His church, His ministry, His purposes, at work, at home, or in our neighborhoods.

God says this to you today: *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)*

Do I believe in Jesus Christ? With all my heart. Do I believe He takes us, blesses us, breaks us, and uses us? Yes with all my heart. And does He promise to stay with us and fight for us? Yes, with Him, the Holy Spirit, our Heavenly Father and all of His angels. Children and adults need to know this.

There are two sacraments of our church that were specifically ordered by our Lord. Last week as a congregation we had baptism. And now the second sacrament –

Communion. Today with Communion we have the chance of remembering what Jesus does with us—He takes us, blesses us, breaks us, and uses us. And so on the night he was betrayed (Worship service moves on to Communion.