

"Are You the Only One Who Doesn't Know?"

Luke 24:13-35

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York Center Church of the Brethren

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Have you ever experienced FOMO? Who knows what F.O.M.O. stands for? (Fear of missing out.) Apparently, since the advent of social media, it is now a very real mental health concern. FOMO is an emotional response to the belief that other people are living better, more fun, more satisfying lives or that you are missing out on important opportunities. It is human nature to compare our lives with others, but social media takes it to a whole new level.

If you are a Facebook or Instagram user you know that most people post only positive things, things that make them happy or make them look good- photos of a great meal, pretty flowers, a fabulous vacation, their brilliant children, adorable well-behaved pets, that kind of thing. Very rarely do they show you the screaming kid on the floor who won't get ready for school or the crummy vacation or the stained blouse you accidentally wore to work or the disobedient dog who practically yanks your arm off when you try to walk him.

There are those who post **only** negative things- that is another mental health issue.

For those who struggle with low self-esteem, the proliferation of "perfect, happy life" social media posts only heightens the fear that you are the only one whose life isn't exactly what you had hoped it would be. It is one thing to appreciate a post from a friend on vacation on a beautiful beach and feel a bit of envy that you aren't there too. But to look at the post and hate them for relaxing on a beach while you are struggling, that's a mental health issue. To assume that they never have tough times like you do, is untrue and unfair.

I dealt with terrible FOMO last year when I was confined to my bed in pain from my injured leg and couldn't go anywhere or do anything and everyone else could. I resented many Facebook posts and at one point stopped looking at it altogether. I even resented the people who, so easily, walked along the sidewalk outside my house.

At its worst, FOMO can lead to a compulsive obsession with social media- constantly checking the posts of others and looking to see who has "liked" or commented on yours. The social media life depicted by many people is a false reality. You usually don't see the whole picture. You can only see what they want you to see, with all the messy stuff cropped out of the photo. FOMO leads to extreme dissatisfaction with our own lives and has a detrimental effect on our physical and mental health. It increases loneliness and feelings of inferiority. It can lead to reduced self-esteem. I am grateful that I survived

my teen and young adult years without social media. I had enough insecurities without adding that to the mix!

On the road to Emmaus two followers of Jesus met a man they thought was suffering from FOMO. It seemed to them as though everyone but this guy knew the horrible, surprising, and confusing things that had happened over the weekend in Jerusalem. Now it was Sunday, and they were walking the seven miles from the holy city to their hometown of Emmaus trying to process all of it- maybe wishing that they had missed out on it. And here comes a guy who asks, "What are you talking about?"

They were shocked. How could he possibly not know? They must have thought he was the most uninformed person on the planet. But, in reality, Jesus was the only one who actually did know what had happened and what **was** happening.

I am impressed with how Cleopas responded to the stranger. He basically poured out his heart and gave his testimony about Jesus. "*He was a prophet,*" he says quite boldly. It makes me wonder if he spoke that boldly about Jesus to strangers **before** the arrest and crucifixion.

Then Cleopas speaks what must be among the most poignant and heart-breaking words in scripture. "*We had hoped he was the one.*" We **had** hoped. With these three short words centuries of expectations were shattered. We had hoped he would overthrow the evil Roman Empire.

We had hoped. But we don't anymore. Their hope died when the hammer hit the first nail in the wooden cross. They had wagered everything on that hope, on that man Jesus, and as far as they could see they had lost it all.

After Cleopas poured out their sad story, the stranger responds rather harshly. "*How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!*" And then he takes them through the scriptures from Moses to Jesus of Nazareth and shows how they are all connected. He showed them how the story of God and God's people wound its way through the centuries from the very beginning to that very moment.

The seven miles went by quickly and as they neared town, they begged the stranger to stay with them; to get some food and rest for the night. He agreed and when they arrived at the house and had settled around the table, suddenly the guest became the host as the stranger picked up a loaf of bread, *blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.*

Now, where have we heard those words before? It must have rung a bell for the two disciples because in that instant their eyes were opened, and they knew it was Jesus! And that quickly he was gone.

As tired as they were from the long stressful week and their seven-mile walk, they got back on the road, returned to Jerusalem, and went to the house where the others were hiding. But when they arrived, everyone was excited because Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter! Then they told their story of the stranger on the road to Emmaus and how he broke the bread for them. In that moment despair turned to joy, disbelief turned to faith; sorrow and grief moved aside and made room for hope.

Even though they couldn't quite understand what was happening, they knew that somehow Jesus was alive and had come back to see them.

They discovered that death had not been the end of Jesus, it was instead his beginning and theirs too. Maybe when the two were walking to Emmaus they didn't recognize Jesus because they were talking about the way things **used** to be. They were focused on the past. The Risen Christ came to show them how things are now. It was all about the future. Jesus wasn't the same anymore and neither were they.

Writer Frederick Buechner reminded us of what an unusual story this is when he wrote: *"All the stories about Jesus appearing to people after his death are strange, and the strangest thing about them is how unglamorous they are, how little fanfare there is about them. If you or I had written them, it would have been hard to resist giving them a little more drama. In the stories of how he was born, there is a whole choir of angels singing and kings arriving from the East with precious gifts; shepherds coming from out of the night to kneel at the manger; and that star. But here, for instance, all we have are two people walking along a dusty road to a town that nobody had hear of much, suddenly aware of footsteps approaching them from behind and being joined by a stranger who was Jesus."*
(1)

Wouldn't it have been great if the Risen Christ had raised more of a ruckus? Can you see him barging into the office of the governor, Pontius Pilate, demanding, *"Now you tell me, what is truth?"* Can you see him storming the palace of Caesar and showing him what true power really looks like?

Yea, me neither. Because that isn't who Jesus was and it isn't who the Risen Christ is. The late Henri Nouwen called the resurrection a "hidden event." He wrote, *"Jesus didn't rise from the grave to prove to those who had crucified him that they had made a mistake or to confound his opponents. Nor did he rise to impress the rulers of his time or to force anyone to believe. Jesus's resurrection was the full affirmation of God's love."*

Christ showed himself only to those who already knew about his love. He made himself known as the risen Lord only to a handful of his close friends. Probably no other event in human history has had such importance while at the same time remaining so unspectacular.

The world didn't notice his resurrection; only a few knew- only those to whom he had chosen to show himself and whom he wanted to send out to announce God's love to the world just as he had done." (2)

The resurrection was a quiet event, but it wasn't a private one. There is nothing private about Easter. Mary sees the empty tomb and runs back to tell the others. Two disciples walk to Emmaus, recognize the Risen Christ, and run back to tell the others. No one kept it a secret- we shouldn't either.

The resurrection of Jesus was so earth-shattering that we are still talking about it today. No one saw it happen and yet it has changed everything. During his ministry, when people met Jesus of Nazareth, they were never the same again. Those who were blind could see, those who were deaf could hear, those who were lost found their way home, those who were cruel became kind, those who were pushed outside were welcomed inside, those who were ignorant became wise, those who were afraid became brave. Lives were changed with just a touch, a word, a presence. People were transformed.

If Easter is true, then through the Risen Christ we have a clearer picture of who God is and how God relates to our world. If Easter is true, then none of us ever need to experience the fear of missing out. His disciples saw the Risen Christ within ordinary situations and places- in a garden at daybreak, at the dinner table as night fell, inside a closed room at night, even in this sanctuary on a Sunday morning.

Frederick Buechner wrote, *"It is precisely at such times as these that Jesus is apt to come, into the midst of life at its most real and inescapable. Not in a blaze of unearthly light, not in the throes of some religious daydream, (not on the steeple some grand cathedral) but... at supper time or walking along the road. This is what all the stories of Christ's return to life have in common. He never approached from on high, but always in the midst, in the middle of people, in the midst of real life.*

The sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often the everyday moments, (the moments we live in), the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears, reveal only... a stranger coming down the road behind us, a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with all of our being and imagination, if we live our lives from the miracle of one instant of our precious lives to the next--- what we may see is Jesus himself, what we may hear is the first faint sound of a voice somewhere deep within us saying that there is a purpose in this life, whether we can understand it completely or not; and that this purpose follows behind us through all our doubting and being afraid, through all our indifference and boredom, to a moment when we suddenly know for sure that everything does make sense because everything is in the hands of God, one of whose names is forgiveness, another is love.

This is what the stories about Jesus coming back to life mean, because Jesus was the love of God alive among us, and not all the cruelty and ignorance of humanity could kill him." (3)

If Easter is true, if the dead Jesus really walked out of that tomb as the Risen Christ; if God overturned the power of death; if the disciples really saw their beloved friend and teacher alive and well--- then everything has changed. If that is true, then Easter is not just one Sunday in the spring, it is a way of life, a way of living and being every day.

This promise of resurrection, new life, and unending grace is so outlandish, so uncommon, and so desperately necessary that it elicits both doubt and faith- and if we allow it to, it will change our lives.

Life is brimming with the resurrection possibilities of the God we know in Jesus. Easter isn't over... it has just begun!

Let's not miss out on a moment of it!

Thanks be to God! Christ is Risen!

Amen.

End notes:

- "The Road to Emmaus," Frederick Buechner, *THE MAGNIFICENT DEFEAT*, Harper and Row, 1966. P. 85.