



Pastor Mike O'Neill
April 30, 2017

Ashes to Fire, Easter Week 3
With Jesus at a Supper Table
Luke 24:13-35

Pattern of Life for a Post-Resurrection Disciple:

Seeking + Instruction = Belief
(1) (2) (3)

1. **Seeking**

2. **Instruction**

3. **Belief**

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West Valley Church
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A2F
Easter Week 3:
With Jesus at a Supper Table
(Luke 24:13-35)¹

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Jesus has risen! It means as much to us today as it did to those first disciples who heard the news. Imagine what it must have been like to receive the news on that resurrection Sunday! Think about what it would be like if it happened today. I can't imagine the overwhelming joy! But *what if you were* there; what if you saw Jesus crucified, and you saw him die. You knew he was buried, but somehow you missed the news that Jesus was raised from the dead. You'd heard the rumors second or third-hand from other people but you did not know for yourself; you just weren't sure. If you can imagine what that was like, it would put you in the place of the disciples in the story from our reading for today.

I hope you have been reading the daily Scripture passages with us in the "Ashes to Fire" morning and evening meditations. In the morning, it gives us selective readings for each day from the Psalms, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Gospels, along with written prayer guides and thoughts. Then in the evening it has a short selection from the Psalms and a written prayer to pray. Have you enjoyed it? I believe there is something powerful that can happen in our church when we are all reading the same Scripture passages each day. I believe it gives the Holy Spirit a profound platform from which to speak to our entire church, to help us be united in heart and mind and mission. I believe it allows the Spirit to do a work in our church collectively and to lead us together so that God can do great and supernatural things in us and through us. We started reading these passages together on February 10th – Ash Wednesday – and we will continue until the day of Pentecost, which is June 4th. Our Sunday sermon focus is on the Scripture readings that coincide with that day.

Last week, if you were with us, you'll remember that we talked about the fact that we all doubt at times, but we can use that doubt to drive us to a deeper, more certain faith. From our Scripture reading today we are going to see the formula for how to genuinely seek and find answers even when we have doubts. I'd like to ask Clay to read the passage for us this morning, and I'm going to ask the rest of us to please honor God's Word by standing as it is read. We are not going to put it on the screen,

¹ Primary resources are **NBBC** John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, *The New Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007).

because the Bible says that faith comes by hearing, and today I want us to concentrate on hearing the Word.

Pray: God, open our hearts and minds to be receptive to your Words to us today. Please make your Word come alive in us as we hear it, that faith may come to us by the Word of God. In the name of your Son, the Living Word, Jesus Christ, amen.

Clay:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

You can be seated. Luke is the author of this Gospel, as well as the author of the book of Acts; they are a kind of part one and part two of the story of Jesus and the young church. In this passage, Luke gives us a pattern for disciples that will continue through the book of Acts: it is the...

Pattern of Life for a Post-Resurrection Disciple

This pattern applies to us too because we live this side of the resurrection, and it shows how we will grow in our faith, how we will grow through, and past, doubts, in an ongoing and closer relationship with God through Christ, and into greater and greater Christlikeness. So let's figure out the pattern so that we can enter into it and practice it.

You'll notice that the pattern is listed as an equation in your notes; the three points I'm going to give you from the passage – numbers one, two, and three – can be transposed into the formula. If you will combine points numbered one and two, it will result in point three, all of which is displayed for us in the story that Clay just read.

We will start with the first section of the story that reveals the first part of the equation which is...

1. *Seeking* (vs 13-24)

Last week we talked about how doubt can arise in the midst of our seeking, and that *seeking* is an important part of our journey in faith. If we don't have hungry hearts that seek after the truth we will accomplish nothing in our Christian faith. And that hunger to seek after Christ should *never* go away, no matter how long we would say we are Christians. So let's see it in this passage.

On the day of the resurrection of Jesus, we see two of his disciples, one was named Cleopas, and the other remains unnamed in the story. They are walking *away* from Jerusalem. Three days ago they watched Jesus be crucified, die, and then be buried. The day after that was Saturday; their Sabbath day. All day on their Sabbath they were despondent. They stayed in Jerusalem for that day because by Jewish law, they were not allowed to walk very far on the Sabbath. But as far as they knew, everything was over; Jesus was dead. So the first chance they got on Sunday, the next day, which was the first day of the week for the Jews, they headed west out of Jerusalem on the long walk back to their homes, by way of the Emmaus Road. It is a seven-mile walk. They, along with many other disciples, are filled with grief and confusion (Luke 23:48; 24:4, 5, 11). As they walk along, despondent, they are talking together trying to make sense of what has happened. They are genuinely seeking for the truth, reminding each other of the things Jesus had taught them as they followed him for those three years, and then replaying together the tragic events of the last week.

As readers of this story, we can identify with them. If you were reading this for the first time, you would not know what was going to happen in the future, but you would know what had happened in the past, just like them. You know from the accounts that Jesus has risen, but you can empathize with these guys. This placement of you in the story is on purpose. In fact, it's interesting that one of the disciples is given a name, but not the other. Why not? After all, Luke was a physician; he had an eye for detail. Why does he name one man and not the other? I think the other man is unnamed so that we can place ourselves in the story. As we read, we can easily be the one walking along that hot, dusty road, talking back and forth with Cleopas. This is important, because like them, we too need to always try to understand and make sense of the events of Scriptures. And like these two, Jesus will come alongside *us*, helping us to sort through our questions and directing our desire to understand.

So Jesus comes alongside them and enters their conversation, but the entire time, they don't realize that it is Jesus; his appearance isn't the same, but he is also keeping his identity from them (for the time being). Sometimes, by the way, it may *seem* to us that Jesus isn't with us. But it doesn't mean he's not there – *he is* – it's just that we can't recognize him! When that's the case, it's usually because Jesus is trying to teach us something.

Anyway, we've seen plenty of times how the disciples didn't grasp the whole picture and were often ignorant, but in this passage we see that they are rational, thinking people who are in an honest and intelligent conversation about the meaning of Jesus' life.

These disciples are doing exactly what *we* must do: we must seek to understand the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus more and more. We cannot simply dismiss these things; these are real events in our history as humans that we need to get hold of. The crucifixion and the resurrection are pivotal events in the human story that we must seek to understand. Every one of us, whether we'd say we have been Christians for a long time or not at all, we must spend our lives seeking to understand in deeper ways what the truths of these events mean, and the implications they have on us. Jesus taught us that if we are going to find truth, we've got to seek it:

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Luke 11:9-10, niv)

If you do this, I can assure you that Jesus will draw near to you in your seeking. When this passage tells us that Jesus came up and walked along with them, it means more than simple physical proximity. It may be he came to them very closely; he came to them as a “revealer,” someone who will enter deeply into their conversations, into their thinking, into their heart-searching. So Jesus asks them questions to help them think it through, and they retell the story of what has happened. And then something takes place in the story: they gain...

2. ***Instruction*** (vs 25-29)

Jesus becomes what's called an "interlocutor;" it means that he is someone who enters into the dialogue and the conversation to help understand it. He begins to ask questions in order to direct their thinking toward what the true answers really are. All the while, the disciples are active participants in this quest for meaning, both emotionally and intellectually. They know how they *feel*, so they are trying to think through and understand, what it all means. You see, our faith is not mere emotions, although it can make us quite emotional; we are expected to engage our brains as well. This is important because we've got to better understand ourselves, and how we fit in the story. We must *keep* seeking to understand and never stop. We've got to realize that we will never have all the answers no matter how many Bible studies we attend or sermons we hear or books we read, because often our own wrong thinking interferes with the truth getting through. We need instruction. And there's great hope in knowing that no matter how much we know, there is always more we can know! There is always greater health and healing emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually that we can discover. But here's something else that is important to realize: while we must genuinely seek, our understanding is *not* going to come from ourselves; we must have God's help if any of this is going to make sense. We can't trust our thinking alone. We need to ask and allow Jesus to come alongside us, allowing him to ask probing questions of us and enlighten our thinking, seeking, questioning, doubting, and our understanding. Remember, for all of the disciples' knowledge of the Bible and their first-hand knowledge of Jesus, they *still* didn't understand it. They had lived with Jesus 24/7 for three years, and they still couldn't connect the dots. They *needed* Jesus to explain it to them. In fact, Jesus, in a very loving but stern way, challenged them for their lack of understanding; he essentially is telling them that they didn't pay close enough attention. I wonder if Jesus might also sternly rebuke us; how often have we read the Bible, or listened to sermons, without attempting to *fully* understand it or believe it. And then we wonder why we struggle in our faith...amidst all of our seeking, we need to ask Jesus to instruct us and help us understand it. Let me tell you, he is more than happy to help us understand it. There is so much of it we simply will not understand if we don't open ourselves up to him and the Spirit to enlighten our limited understanding. You'll see in the story that Jesus was able to help the two disciples connect the dots from all the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies about Jesus. This was important to Luke, the writer of this Gospel. He had already listed thirty direct references to the Old Testament throughout his Gospel (1:15; 2:23, 24; 4:4, 8, 10-11, 12, 18-19; 7:22, 27; 8:10; 9:54; 10:27; 13:19, 35; 18:20; 19:38, 46; 20:17, 28, 37, 42-43; 21:26, 27, 37, 69; 23:24, 30, 46). Then, if we include the Old Testament passages that Luke made *indirect* references to, there are 525 references to the Old Testament in the Gospel of Luke! So this story today shows us how *all* the Scriptures come to fulfillment in Jesus. When it says that Jesus explained the events of the last week in light of the Old Testament, the word for "explain" that is used to describe what Jesus does for the disciples on the road means literally to "translate." Jesus "translated" the Old Testament into the language of the life of Jesus. We need Jesus to translate for us, too.

Even right now, as we discuss this story from God's Word, there may be things we don't understand, and we need to. So if you haven't already, let's stop and invite Jesus to speak to us.

Pray

Okay, you've got the first two parts of the equation that is the pattern of life for a post-resurrection disciple: we must always seek to understand Jesus – we must have a heart hunger to understand him more and more and more, and we must allow Jesus to add instruction to our seeking in the Scriptures. When we do this, we will be able to come to the place of greater...

3. ***Belief*** (vs 30-35)

Seeking, plus instruction, equals belief. Here's what is really cool in this story: so the disciples and Jesus have been walking along the road. The disciples are trying to make sense of the events of the last few days, and then Jesus comes along and joins them and begins explaining it all to them. Eventually, they arrive at their destination toward evening, but Jesus indicates that he's going to keep walking. The disciples, still not realizing that it is Jesus who is with them, invite him to stay with them for dinner. *Then Jesus, the guest in the story, becomes Jesus the host, and serves them their food.* At what point is it in the story when the disciples realize that he is Jesus? *When he breaks the bread.* Why is that? What is it about *that* act that clues them in? *It recalled the Last Supper.*

This scene is very, very similar to the Passover meal in Luke 22:14-23. The writer Luke brackets the death and resurrection event with table fellowship. Before and after Jesus' death and resurrection is a meal together. Both meals occur as darkness is falling. Both occur at a table hosted by Jesus. The first is the "last supper" with Jesus and his disciples, which inaugurates the sacramental meal. The second supper, in this story, is the "first supper" which inaugurates and institutes our communion meal in the post resurrection era.

The language in both meals is the same: Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. In both passages there is bread, thanksgiving, and breaking of the bread.

The *remembrance* of Jesus in the "last supper" becomes the *presence* of Jesus in the "first supper."

Do you see this? There are two meals, but together the meal tells the story about the darkness and suffering of Jesus' death, as well as the power and celebration of Jesus' life. Communion, or the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, whatever you want to call it – communion unifies both sides of the resurrection divide: Jesus' life, death, and his resurrection.

When we share together in communion, the remembrance of Jesus' death gives way to the presence of Jesus among us. (repeat)

We consider communion to be something that we call a “means of grace.” In other words, it is an act through which Jesus reveals himself to us in a deeper way. If we are willing to sincerely, always, seek Jesus, and to receive instruction from him, he can be counted on to reveal himself to us in ways that will challenge and deepen our belief. And he does it in mysterious ways at the table with us.

The Emmaus road story is a metaphor and formula and pattern for our lives as followers of Jesus following his resurrection. When we seek Jesus and attempt to understand the Scriptures, the living Jesus, through the Presence of the Holy Spirit, will walk beside us, and teach us all about God’s plans. Christianity is not some set of objective truths that need to be comprehended; Christianity is a *revealed religion*. God himself reveals himself to us through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, you understand completely what Cleopas and the other disciple meant when they said, “Weren’t our hearts burning within us?”

The Communion Table is the defining event that bridges the pre- and post-resurrection experience of Jesus’ disciples. Today, Jesus joins *us* at the table, in his human ministry, his suffering and death, *and* his resurrected glory, all at the same time. It is a mystery, but the table is the place that Jesus reveals mysteries to us.

We’ve come to this place this morning to honor and praise Jesus; in essence, he is our guest here as we worship him. But our prayer is that Jesus the guest may become Jesus our host, here at the table.

Pastors, please come help prepare the elements and to serve God’s people.

Pray, consecrate the elements:

We offer you these elements. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit that they may become for us the body and blood of your Jesus Christ. May he be revealed to us here in a deeper, more profound way as we seek him and learn from him.

Give instructions. Serve each other, serve the people.

Pray