

Cleopas, and his good friend, (nameless in the Gospels), are heading home to Emmaus after an extremely odd and exciting week in Jerusalem. During their seven-mile walk, they are processing out loud what happened and why? “I don’t get it.” “Jesus looked to be our Messiah.” “It was all onward and upward last Sunday but for some unknown reason, things went south in a hurry.” “Inexplicably, our very own leaders turned him over to the Romans to be crucified.”

Their conversation is interrupted by a mystery traveler. Having an inquisitive nature, he asks Cleopas and his pal, “Why the long faces?” Cleopas responds, “Come on, Man!” “Are you the only one on the planet that hasn’t heard about the curious case of Jesus?” He looked to be the ‘One’ but suffered a severe reversal of fortune and went from rags-to-riches-back-to-rags quicker than overcaffeinated origami artist.” “And by rags, I mean crucifixion, the dirtiest rag of them all.” “I’m a pretty positive guy, but it’s hard to turn lemons into lemonade out of this one.”

“However, news started circulating that some of our women folk went to his tomb this morning to apply odoriferous spices but came away claiming that Jesus is alive.” “They said they spoke with him face-to-face and touched him.” “Even our leaders, Peter and John went to the tomb for a quick look see and although they didn’t see Jesus, they did say the tomb was empty however.” “If any of this is true, what in God’s holy name does it mean?” “And more importantly, ‘What happened to Jesus?’” “You really haven’t heard about any of this?” The mystery man responds (Luke 24:24-25 Message),

25 “So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said? 26 Don’t you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter his glory?”

“Hold on there Mr.” Cleopas objects. “Like everyone else, we are just trying to make sense of all this.” So, for the next several miles the mystery traveler connects the theological dots that what had transpired the past week was foretold from the Old Testament.

Ancient custom dictated hospitality to strangers so when the three reach the border of Emmaus, Cleopas, and his sidekick, invite their newly minted theologian friend to dinner. He initially hesitates, but at the end of the day a free supper is a free supper, so he accepts their invitation. Listen to how the “Message Bible” describes what happened next (Luke 24:30-31):

30 He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed it and broke it and gave it to them. 31 At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

After Jesus reveals himself to them, he vanishes into thin air. I can’t wait to get one of those resurrected/glorified bodies that are no longer bound to space-time physics! Now that’s what you call a full-body transplant! Now Cleopas and his pal have even more processing to do. They begin to dialogue amongst themselves (v32),

**Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road
and explained the Scriptures to us?**

Their case of spiritual heartburn reminds me of one of the more well-known spiritual experiences of church history, that of John Wesley’s, the founder of the Methodist movement. Although he was an Oxford professor, Anglican Priest, and itinerant missionary, he went to London’s Aldersgate Chapel

in search of a deeper relationship with God. As someone was teaching on Luther's "Preface to the Epistle to Romans" something profound happened to him.

While [the teacher] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

Wesley went on to say that he felt, for the first time, that he had truly trusted Christ as Savior and had received the assurance of salvation. Not that any two spiritual experiences are identical, but when I gave my life to Christ as a "wet behind the ears, knee high to a grasshopper" ten-year-old scraper, I too had the sensation of my heart being warmed. Although I have not had this kind of sensation since, I can tell you this occurred well before I knew any church history or even of the man, Mr. John Wesley. I think I need to start a "Warmed Heart" conversion club (lol). Be that as it may, after Christ reveals himself to them, Cleopas and his pal, put on their jogging sandals and double time it back to Jerusalem to notify the others that Jesus is alive.

Why Didn't They Recognize Him?

We are not told why Cleopas and his pal recognized Jesus only after the blessing and breaking of the bread. Some see it as sacramental, others that Jesus sovereignly reveals himself only to whomever he wants, whenever he wants, while others say we just don't have the neural pathways to comprehend the supernatural. The 13 post-resurrection responses to Jesus, however, are a mixed bag. Some see Jesus, and recognize him instantly, others more gradually, and some, not until they receive proof. Regardless of which, Cleopas and his pal's misapprehension of Jesus reminds me of the Old Testament Patriarch Jacob. One night he has a lucid dream of a ladder that spans, and touches, heaven and earth with heavenly beings ascending and descending upon it. Startled, he wakes up and confesses (Genesis 28:16),

Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it.

God's Omnipresence

Obviously, God is omnipresent, i.e., he can be in many places at once (not that he is always everywhere at the same time, he's not ether or air). I mean, he is here right now, especially based on his promise, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20) and that he "Inhabits the praises of his people" (Psalm 22:3). And obviously, "Christ dwells in our hearts by faith" through the Holy Spirit according to Paul in Ephesians 3:17. Because he is the Emmanuel "With" God (Isaiah 7:14), Christ followers are never devoid, or without, his Presence.

Distractions

However, like Cleopas, his friend, and Jacob, we are often unaware of his Presence. One reason I believe this is so because we are hyper-distracted people (disguised as multitasking). Our digital culture is inherently distracting as evidenced that ADHD diagnoses have been doubling every decade for the past 30 years! Too often we are like our family dog Crosby. Although he can see up to 200 yards in the dark and can smell up to 150 things simultaneously, he frequently passes, sometimes within inches of his face, his friendly foes, the rabbits, because he is distracted by everything else going on around him (kids, squirrels, dogs, birds, cars, etc.). To his chagrin, seconds later he realizes that he missed a golden opportunity to yank out my arm and give one a good scare.

Conclusion: Keep A Distraction Log

Hundreds of times throughout Scripture we are commanded to seek God, not because God is playing a cosmic game of hide-and-seek, but because we are creatures easily distracted and are so by such things as phones, TVs, social media, worries, and the tyranny of the urgent, etc. Because God has much to reveal to us, let's minimize our distractions so that we can better recognize his voice, know his ways, and deepen our relationship with him. One practical way to do this is by keeping a "Distraction Log." I started one this week and found out that Crosby and I share a common trait, the attention span of a gnat! Nevertheless, if we are aware of what distracts us and deal with it so we can be more aware of God presence in our lives.

Try it for one day and see what turns up.

Amen?