

A Woman Who Was Strengthened through Christ
Luke 24:13-35

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May 10, 2020

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Lk. 24:13

In setting up this sermon in this way for Mother's Day, with this topic growing out of this text, I am following the suggestion of some biblical scholars that the two Emmaus disciples are a husband and wife team.¹ Rather than lay out the evidence for this suggestion, I will simply draw upon it and treat the text as though the unnamed disciple is a woman.

My thinking this Mother's Day in particular is that mothers do not want to be *celebrated* this year so much as they want to be *strengthened*. They are already strong, but the longer the demands of the pandemic last the more they wonder how they will find the strength to go on.

The story of the woman from Emmaus supplies us with the materials for a case study in how one woman was strengthened through Christ. The strength she received is waiting for each one of you and from the same Lord.

The woman from Emmaus is our contemporary.

Though this woman is an ancient personality from the Bible her experience is much like that of women and men today.

This woman's life has been turned upside-down all of a sudden. She and her husband had been planning a future full of peace and prosperity, a future in which their dreams came true and they were free to do as they pleased. That plan was hurled to the ground at Calvary with the death of Jesus. Now instead of the happy and buoyant faces they had just a week ago on Palm Sunday their faces are sad and their chins are at their chests. "We had hoped Jesus was the one to redeem Israel," they said. But now that hope of old is in the past and they are headed home to shelter themselves there.

The woman and her husband are doing their best to follow the news, but what they hear is more confusing than illuminating. There are reports that the corpse of Jesus is missing, that angels appeared to some women of their acquaintance, and that those reports have been substantiated. Still, it is all unclear to the two from Emmaus. The woman and her husband wonder what they can believe in the news they hear.

¹ N. T. Wright is one scholar who makes this suggestion. See N. T. Wright, "The Resurrection and the Post-Modern Dilemma," *ntwrightpage*, April 5, 2016. <https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/04/05/the-resurrection-and-the-postmodern-dilemma/>. Accessed April 30, 2020. See also, N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 291ff.

That draws a fairly contemporary picture, doesn't it? Drive through town today and behind every front door life has turned in a different direction than the one planned. Hope is threatened. People are nervously on edge as they listen to the news. Heads are held low and shoulders are stooped in weariness and fatigue.

This woman from Emmaus is our contemporary.

Jesus is the woman's companion.

Some of you will remember the story of the Scottish Covenanters that I told at the start of our quarantine. The Covenanters were a group of Protestants opposed to Catholic rule, and their way of worship was outlawed. So they gathered for worship secretly in the out-of-doors and stationed watchmen to warn of approaching soldiers who would arrest them. They were worshipping one day and a watchman sounded the alarm. The people began to scatter, but, before they left, their pastor reminded them of the everlasting companionship of Christ, and said, "If there be one of you, Christ will be the second. If there be two of you, Christ will be the third. You will never, never lack for company."² That is exactly what happened here along the Emmaus Road. Two walked along in despair, and Christ became their companion.

Notice this especially. Jesus accompanies this woman and she is totally unaware of the fact that it is Jesus accompanying her. The presence of Christ is not one bit contingent on the quality of her faith, her character, or of her ability to call upon him in prayer. Christ's presence is not one bit dependent on her ability to see him or to know that he is there.

Jesus accompanies this woman in the conversations she has with her husband. Those two are talking about their hope. They are talking about their disappointment and fears. They are talking about the news. They are carrying on the very same conversations you are carrying on in your head, in your marriage, in your families, in your circles of friends. Those two along the Emmaus Road don't know it is Jesus weaving himself into their conversation; we don't see it is he weaving himself in our conversations. But he is in every syllable, between every word, and undergirding every sentence. Christ is with us in our conversation.

Jesus accompanies this woman into her home. She is headed there in forced retreat from her disappointment and he joins her there. He entered her home just as it was. My mother always wanted things picked up whenever we left to go anywhere because, as she said, "You never know who is going to walk in with you." Jesus walked in with this woman and her husband. He didn't care if her house was cluttered or clean. He was glad to be there. And he was glad to be at table, taking part in the home's simple evening meal.

Jesus is this woman's companion and he is ours in the same way.

Jesus is the source of new strength for the woman from Emmaus.

The evidence of her new strength is in the change that overtook the woman and her husband. At the beginning of the story they are crestfallen, sad-faced, and their chins are at their chests. Midway through the story all they can think about is the lateness of the hour and evening's swift approach. And yet, before the evening was over they returned to Jerusalem,

² James S. Stewart, *The Wind of the Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), p. 133-134.

retracing the seven miles they had just covered. They moved from despair to excitement, from fatigue to energy.

What made for the difference was the happy, fleeting glimpse they had of the Living Christ. All of it – the walking along the way, the talking, the eating at table – came together in one flash, and suddenly there was hope again. No longer was there just a past to lament. There was a future to anticipate with joy, and this reappearance of hope was strengthening.

A similar experience occurred to a nurse during the 1917 flu epidemic. A New York pastor told about it at the time. She was the superintendent of nurses at a large hospital. The epidemic had been raging for a month. Her staff was already depleted because much of it was overseas due to the war. The superintendent had been working around the clock, helping to cover the heavy work load. She was exhausted, and her remaining staff begged her to sleep and to get some medical help for her nerves. Instead of sleeping and instead of consulting a medical specialist, she went to church the next day, which was a Sunday. Why she did she wasn't sure; she hadn't been to church in years. But it strengthened her. That hour with hymns and prayers and thoughts eternal soothed her mind, calmed her nerves, and restored her in body and soul. She went back to her work refreshed and able to carry on with vigor.³

Christ Jesus is the source of new strength.

This is my Mother's Day gift for you. It's not mine. It's the Bible's. It's the gift of knowing your story is told in scripture. It tells you that you are neither alone in your feelings nor wrong for feeling the way you do. It's the gift of good news – the news that Christ is alive and present in your home even if you don't realize it. It is the gift of knowing there is more power in a fleeting glimpse of Jesus than in any pandemic, however strong.

³ Henry Sloane Coffin, *What to Preach* (Cleveland: Church World Press, 1926), p. 98-99.