

Six Practices That Grow Faith: Talk 7/12/26

Luke 24:13-35

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It's good to return to the New Testament and the Gospels this morning, is it not? The Sunday after Lent and Easter we went off the deep end and did a backward dive into the Prophets. Unlike we're used to, we didn't talk about Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in literal flames over the heads of the disciples. And we didn't have Ascension Day where Jesus goes up into the clouds to God into heaven. But kids, did you get to talk about this in Sunday School though..? Maybe some grown ups did too!

And Eric wrapped up the Prophets last Sunday by bringing us back into the New Testament and highlighting Jesus, the Epic Prophet that all the prophets had been pointing to all along! And that is almost a perfect setup to return to where we left off on Easter..with the women disciples discovering the empty tomb and running to alert the others, who weren't sure if they believed them—and Peter running as fast as he could to the gravesite and finding that it was, sure enough, empty. He runs back to Jerusalem to tell the others, “Yep, he's gone!”

Can you imagine how stunned and confused they were? First their friend is taken from them, beaten, and killed. And buried. And just as they were perhaps starting to think about how they will have to find a way to accept this new reality—now his body is missing..

So Jesus's friends are sitting around thinking about this when suddenly two of the disciples jump up and head out the door. “Aaaagh! We gotta get out of this town!” Maybe they had a wise old grandma or grandpa at Emmaus (town about 7 miles away), or a wise aunt or uncle or former teacher or family friend they were going to go tell about all that had happened, and all the questions—and see what *they* have to say about it.

Or maybe they just needed a walk to clear their heads. My therapist told me just this week that walking, or running, is scientifically proven to help

moderate the brain's response to stress and suppresses a network in the brain that is associated with mind-wandering and negative thinking.

So they're walking along, and *talking*. Talking about all that has happened. And this other dude catches up with them and says "What are you guys talking about?"

Kids, have you ever been playing in the playground, swinging or climbing and talking to a friend that you spend a lot of time with...and someone else joins you and they say, "what are you guys talking about?"

"What are we talking about?" They stopped, their faces downcast "Are you kidding me? Are you the only person around Jerusalem that doesn't know these things that have been going on?"

"What things?" he asks.

"What things? Seriously? The things about Jesus of Nazareth! How he was, like, the greatest prophet that has ever been known. We thought he was going to save us and our people. But not everyone wanted to hear what he had to say and he got himself nailed to a wooden cross. And he died. And his body put in a grave. And now, three days later, we find out his body is missing!"

Maybe they walk in silence for a minute or so. And then...

"Don't you get it?" the man says. 'No,' they say. "Have you guys not heard the message of the prophets? They've been talking about this for centuries, guys! Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Micah, all talking about a messiah who would come from God and show you how to live as God your Creator intended for you to live. And how people would not understand it, and they would kill him...ah, but he won't stay dead...he'll come alive again 3 days later...don't you get it?"

About that time they arrive at the house they were going to in Emmaus. It seems like this guy is going to continue on, but they say “hey, it's getting late, come have dinner with us and stay here with us.” And they sit down to dinner at the table. And the man took a loaf of bread, said a prayer of blessing over it, and broke it, and gave it to them. “OH! It's Jesus himself!” Now they could see it was their friend. “Weren't our hearts burning within us as we walked along talking to him?”

Why didn't the two disciples recognize him until now? That's hard to understand. There are lots of things that we don't completely understand. Do you think Jesus got a haircut, or cut his beard and that's why they didn't recognize him? Who knows? Or maybe God kept them from recognizing him in order to teach them, and us, all something about how we learn faith, or believing in things of God that we can't always literally see.

What could God have been trying to teach them, and us? Maybe it is simply this: Faith takes root as we *talk about these things* we don't understand as we move about our ordinary lives. Sometimes I wonder if we grown-ups think we have to have things all figured out in order to be able to talk with children about the things that aren't clear cut and easily understood. But like these 2 disciples, perhaps when we talk about our faith with our kids along the road, even though we have more questions than answers, faith begins to take root.

Hey kids, what things do you find confusing, or puzzling or hard to understand? Chances are, if you find them confusing, your parents might find them hard to understand too. They may have some of those questions too, and some thoughts that they can add to your questions as you talk about them.

And why do Jesus' friends suddenly recognize him when he gives them the bread? I don't know, but maybe God is trying to teach us something about how faith is best digested in little pieces. If we think of bread as faith, we can only really taste, feel and enjoy its texture in small bites. It would be weird to just bite into a whole loaf of bread, wouldn't it?

Kids, when your grown-ups give you things that are a little harder to chew (like steak) they probably cut it into little pieces, right? That makes it easier to chew, swallow and digest.

Perhaps that's how faith takes root. Perhaps it's in the vulnerability of the questions, more so than the big answers, that this transfer gradually gets made from one generation to the next? Those small bites of faith.

Parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles, teachers, mentors—be honest with our younger folks about the things you don't completely understand, and where there are more questions than answers.

Oh, I know, us Mennonites are really good at just trying to let our lives do the speaking and not use words. But our Scripture today encourages us to use words too, especially with our children! Talk about faith along the road of life, as you are driving home from school, or baseball practice, or vacation, at the dinner table, or taking a walk after dinner. Or at bedtime.

Over these next 6 weeks counting today, we're going to be highlighting 6 practices that Grow Faith. And the first one today is simply, *talking* about our faith "as you walk along the road". This can be a spiritual practice that all of us benefit from, no matter our age, and whether we're a parent and relate closely with children or not. And if we live alone, we can perhaps find others who we can share our faith with along the road. Just be a little more intentional about talking out our faith and what motivates and inspires us. Or simply noticing things and pointing them out. Don't try to make it too tidy or conclusive. Let our children know that we have questions that we live with and keep asking. And children, let your grown-ups know that *you* have questions.

If you wrote a question or a thought on a speech bubble, bring it on up while we sing the song. Pastor Lois and I will help you tape them up.