

“The Unexpected Surprise”

Prayer of Illumination: Prepare our hearts, O Lord, to accept your word. Silence in us any voice but your own; that, hearing, we may also obey your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Worship Book, 1970, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.))

Scripture Readings: Luke 24:13-35

Devotion:

Whenever I teach or lead a Bible study on this particular Scripture I ask my audience to think about their own “Emmaus Road” experience. I normally ask the question, “Where is your ‘Road to Emmaus’—the place where Jesus surprised you recently?” Then I ask the following question, “What happened?”

These are very open-ended questions to help us explore how God surprises us with hope, meaning, and purpose for our lives. Jesus surprises his two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus by joining them in their travels and asking, “What are you talking about?” From this question Jesus ascertains the disciples are talking about him, and yet, surprisingly the disciples are unable to recognize Jesus. Jesus teaches in this opportunity of unrecognition.

Jesus teaches the disciples what the Old Testament prophets said about Him being the true Messiah: Isaiah 7:14 (Mt. 1:23); Isaiah 53:4-12 (I Pet. 2:21-25); Micah 5:2 (Jn. 7:42); Malachi 3:1 (Mt. 11:10); Zechariah 9:9 (Mt. 21:4-5); Zechariah 12:10 (Jn. 19:37), Zechariah 13:7 (Mk. 14:27, Mk. 14:49-50); Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb. 8:7-13); Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21); Hosea 2:23 (Rom. 9:25); Daniel 7:14,27 (Rev. 11:15). I am sure the disciples appreciate Jesus’ roundabout Bible study during their walk. I am certain they learned a lot about Jesus and Him being the Messiah. I expect, however, their biggest surprise was when they recognized Jesus in the way He broke bread with them during their evening meal.

I believe a person’s faith accumulates and expresses itself ultimately when we share one another life’s necessities like food, water, shelter, clothing, etc... This was my “Emmaus Road” Jesus experience when I read and studied this Scripture passage many years ago as I earned my Master of Social Work Degree from Washington University in St. Louis in 1994. Social and community action began to become a part of my ministry.

Another “Emmaus Road” Jesus experience came about when I served at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis as a part-time Emergency Room/Trauma Chaplain from 1994-1995, and when I served with the United States Navy as a Chaplain from 1996-2016. These “Emmaus Road” experiences reflect upon human suffering, illness, and death. The unexpected surprise in having my eyes opened like the two disciples was in my ability to help hospital patients and their families, as well as, my fellow sailors and Marines, and their families to cope with traumas and deaths. Pastoral care and counseling became the necessary focus of my ministry during this time in my life.

Now at the present moment, one of my unexpected “Emmaus Road” surprises is how our church has risen to the occasion and created a virtual worship service and ministry on Facebook and YouTube. Another “Emmaus Road” surprise has been the forming of our church’s Session telephone ministry. I witness how our Elders, office staff, and church members do things they have never done before on electronic media, nor ever thought of doing before over the telephone.

So, where is your “Road to Emmaus” experience—the place where Jesus surprised you recently? What happened?

For me, my unexpected surprise is how you and I are becoming the disciples whom Jesus has called us to be, The First Presbyterian Church of Taymouth.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercessory and Supplication: (Ask people what they wish to pray for today, briefly inquire about it, and pray for them. Ask them to join in your prayer.)

The Lord’s Prayer: (Say the prayer in unison.) Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26)