
On the Road Again
Wesley Mimico United Church
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by Rev. Dr. Paul Shepherd

Based on Luke 24:13-35

Well - what do you think of that gospel story. What do you think of the idea that two of the disciples were walking down the road - with Jesus - and they were so wrapped up in their own issues that they did not recognize Jesus. Is that even remotely believable? Well, let's do a little test.

[show "distraction test" clip] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4>

It is astounding just how much we can miss when we are too self-absorbed. So perhaps the story of the disciples walking down the road with Jesus and them *not* recognizing him is not so amazing after all. What perhaps is more astounding in the story is that the disciples walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus - and back - in one day. To any of us who tried to use the Gardiner Expressway this week, *that* fact is absolutely incredible.

But instead of getting distracted *myself* by stories of woe in commuting, I will instead quote from Father Errol Fernandes, "This story of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, which is found only in the Gospel of Luke, speaks about the failure of two disciples to recognize their fellow traveler. The moment they recognize the Lord, he disappears from their sight. The story is for the sake of those who will believe without seeing. It tells us that the presence of the Lord can be known in experiences that transcend the events of the resurrection appearances. It tells us that, even in the darkest moments of our lives, when we are tempted to throw up our hands in despair, when we are tempted to give up, the Lord is walking by our side. We have only to 'open' our eyes to see.

Emmaus is not simply a geographical location. It is a place to which we go to

escape from the realities of life when we find them too hard or harsh to bear. This may be an external place (a movie theatre, out of the home, somewhere on the road) or a habit (excessive drinking) or even an internal disposition that we may adopt (giving into frustration, despair, despondency, depression, etc). Emmaus may be a feeling that life is not worth living; that everything is in vain, that it is of no use to anyone whatsoever.

Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die, that even noble and pure ideals like love, fellowship, and freedom, have been twisted by people for selfish ends. The risen Lord meets us on this, our road to Emmaus, and assures us of his presence. He invites us not to give up or give in. He tells us that we must continue despite all evidence to the contrary, and that we must keep on keeping on. The story also warns us that the Lord will not always come in the manner in which we expect him to come and, that he may come when we least expect him.”¹

I’m sorry. I just can’t do this. I simply *must* talk about the Gardiner Expressway repairs that are going on right now. Because there are just too many similarities between the Gardiner Expressway and the road to Emmaus. As you know, last week the city started a multi-year project to fix, restore, or perhaps even destroy the expressway. And that change leads us to change ourselves. In The Star this week they had this to say about it: “By all reports, closing two lanes of the Gardiner Expressway for two years is the sort of thing that brings commuters to tears. At best an inconvenience, at worst a disaster, it will turn a bad situation into a nightmare.”²

Well. On the one hand I completely agree. I myself have been inconvenienced by the lane closures on the Gardiner, and the 2 year period is just beginning. And from that perspective, the idea of the construction lasting for at least 2 years does not exactly create a lot of hope. On the other hand ... the construction does engender a lot of hope - at least for me.

¹ <http://errolsj.blogspot.ca/2011/04/what-is-it-that-keeps-you-from.html>

² http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/04/29/gardiners_closure_is_transits_opening_hume.html

The Gardiner Expressway to me represents not the elephant in the room, but rather the dinosaur in the room. Again, according to The Star, “[The Gardiner Expressway] was dreamed up in earlier, less sophisticated, times when people genuinely thought the car would take them wherever they wanted to go.” But of course, that model does not fit the reality of most of the citizens of Toronto any more. Personally, I hate driving and I hate owning a car. Or more to the point, I hate being forced to own a car in order to work in this city. Of course, many car lovers may feel that the construction on the Gardiner is forcing them to take public transit for the next couple of years. But the point is that the repair work on the Gardiner can be seen as a problem. Or it can be seen as an opportunity to try new things, to embrace public transit, to actually consider transportation in today’s world. The repair work is an opportunity to fall in love with our GO trains for example.

The biggest barriers to the use of public transportation in Toronto are not physical. The biggest barriers are “cultural, psychological, and emotional.”³ To quote The Star again - “The fact is that life without a car is beyond the imagination of most North Americans. They would be lost without their automobiles.”⁴

The saga of the Gardiner Expressway relates to the road to Emmaus. It also relates to the road that this congregation is on right now. That “road” was made quite real yesterday at our Community Spring Market, as we sold off (or tried to) many items from this building in anticipation of moving out of our building this summer. Like the Gardiner Expressway, the prospect of fixing this building is too daunting to consider. Yes, people have maintained the vital infrastructure so that the building - and the people - have survived. We can only thank God for the dedicated workers that have kept the building safe and warm! But this building - like the Gardiner Expressway, was created for a different time - a time when people flocked to churches like ours. And that time is now part of the time that we call history. That time is in the past.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

We are moving out this summer, into a life that is shared between the public library, the Lutheran church, and the Presbyterian church. Later on of course we may be able to move back into this location, into a newly renovated building. But the first step is to leave here and to make a new home. A home where we can not only survive, but thrive.

Many of the physical issues have been dealt with, and our plans for the fall are firming up. But just like convincing people to take public transit, the main barriers to our move are not physical. The main barriers are cultural, psychological, and emotional. The question for us is - is the life of our community of faith without this building beyond our imagination? I certainly hope not! Can we imagine and live into a future where we worship without many of our familiar symbols? How will we recognize Jesus in our midst when we are in the library?

It is very possible that we will be like the disciples in today's reading. Jesus will be walking with us, but we may not always recognize him in our midst. But if we are not too self-absorbed, we will be able to see the risen Christ in our midst. We will have each other. We will have God's spirit. We will have our traditions. And we will continue to break bread together. And in the breaking of bread, we will recognize Jesus in our midst.

According to The Star, most North American would be lost without their cars. Will we be lost without this building? Well, that's up to us. And I look forward to finding out!

The risen Jesus meets us on our own road to Emmaus. May we have the vision to see him. Thanks be to God.

Amen.