

Two Disciples Walk Alongside

Psalm 118:14-24

Luke 24:13-27

Helen Keller once said that if a person has faith and friends, a person can stand anything. I think a good friend is one who with whom we can talk comfortably and walk alongside tirelessly. Having good friends is blessing for one's life.

Last Monday afternoon, Sun and I offered ourselves up to be tempted by devil, not in the desert, but on the mountain, the "Devil's Tower," located in the northeast corner of Wyoming. We traveled to Devil's Tower and Mount Rushmore for short tour. We left Monday afternoon about 4:00 p.m. and returned home at midnight on Tuesday.

When we reached Devil's Tower, I was amazed and sensed that this Devil's Tower was not a place of the devil but a place of prayer. Sun and I walked along the trail around Devil's Tower and sensed that many people had prayed in that place. Many branches were tied with bundles, yellow, red and blue, colorfully adorned just the way we had tied the yellow ribbons on the trees for our soldiers. The bundles at Devil's Tower were signs of prayers for families, children, husbands and wives.

Sun and I sat on the bench for a while and took a time of prayer for friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, and those who need our prayers. The place was a good place to have prayer time. The place was quiet, calm, serene, and even sacred. If I lived nearby the place, I would go up to the place for prayer very often.

Today's scripture reading, Luke 24:13-27, introduces two friends, disciples of Jesus, who are walking along and talking about someone. I would like to reflect on these two friends today and their journey for our religious life. There are two issues for reflection.

First, they were talking about someone's scandal in a serious way.

They were talking over scandal. Someone's scandal often happens to be our topic for conversation in our world. What you talk about is what you're concerned about. What you talk about tells what you are interested in. The scandal that we talk about mostly involves people who have been dishonored, disgraced or shamed. But, the original meaning of scandal comes from the Greek word, "skandalon," which means stumbling block. The disciples were talking about the scandal of Jesus' Cross and His Resurrection.

The greatest scandal in history is the talk about the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. Paul said, "The cross is either foolishness or an offense, stumbling block (skandalon)." Take away the Cross, Paul testifies, and there is no gospel to proclaim. The Cross is the distinctive Christian symbol of God's victory in apparent defeat. The good news was not an ethical code or a new religious idea. It was, rather, the telling of the marvelous story that in Jesus of Nazareth, God had actively entered into the human struggle, changing

Jesus' suffering and defeat into victory by raising him from the dead and inaugurating a "new creation."

Someone may see Jesus' Cross as a scandalous matter, but it is the event of marvelous victory. The Cross is symbol of salvation and victory for us all.

The two disciples were talking about the cross and resurrection of Jesus. It was serious talk. Talking of God or about God is called "theology." They were talking about Jesus while they were walking along when the risen Jesus appeared to them. He walked with them and listened to their talk about Jesus. But, the disciples didn't recognize Jesus who was walking with them. Jesus got involved in their talk and asked them, "What are you talking about?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" Cleopas must have been someone known well among the people. Do you know the name Cleopatra? I'm sure you know the name, the name of the woman who was the last person to rule Egypt as an Egyptian Pharaoh, whose lovers included Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Cleopatra is the feminine of the name Cleophatros, and Cleopas is an abbreviation of the name Cleophatros. Maybe they were related!

Anyway, Cleopas and his friend were shocked when Jesus asked them what they were talking about. They explained what had happened in Jerusalem. They talked about Jesus of Nazareth. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and Roman rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. But, he was killed by crucifixion. It has been three days since he died. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then, some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Of course, Jesus said them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets said!" He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Jesus himself appeared to them, drew near to them, and walked with them and talked with them. But, their eyes were held that they should not know him. That is, something "held" their eyes shut so that they could not recognize Him. There is something that blocks our understanding and eyes to Jesus. What is this? Is this lack of faith?

Second, they were walking along a different direction from faith when they were talking about God. Theology and faith are not the same. Theology is like talking about God, while faith is walking with God. Don't talk a lot about God, walk along with God tirelessly!

Interestingly, the two disciples were talking about Jesus while they were walking along the road toward the village of Emmaus from Jerusalem, where other disciples gathered. Jerusalem is a symbolic place for worship. The two disciples departed from Jerusalem toward a safe place to hide from persecution. It is ironic that they were talking about Jesus, but they were headed in the opposite direction from Jerusalem.

The direction in which you walk reflects your faith. Though what one says may seem like good theology, it is the direction in which a person walks which tells where that person is in faith. In life, there are two ways of walking; the way away from home, and the way toward home; the way uphill and the way downhill; the ascending way and the descending way.

The way that the two disciples were walking was descending from the Jerusalem. They were in despair and discouraged because they didn't believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. They doubted the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. Discarding their faith in Jesus, they were descending from the community of faith in Jerusalem.

Are you despairing of something in your religious life? Don't be discouraged by that. The risen Jesus is walking with us even when our walking becomes tired and fatigued by despair in our religious life.

Last Sunday, Easter, I was supposed to preach on the title, "Wear your Nike's on Easter." Philly asked me last Sunday after service, "Where are your Nike shoes?" I ignored the sermon title, since I didn't have much time to preach on the title. Why Nike shoes? Do you get it? Nike means victory in Greek.

The Greek letter "V", looks like a checkmark, is called "Ni" in Greek, and sounds like an "n." So, the checkmark on the side of all Nike shoes is a stylized Greek letter "Ni" and stands for the Greek word for victory.

On Easter day, very early in the morning, there were brave women who visited the tomb of Jesus, taking the spices that they had prepared to use for the body of Jesus. As they arrived at the tomb, they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. When they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

The names of the women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them. These were the women who ran to the eleven disciples and the rest of them, and told them, "Jesus is risen!" But the disciples did not believe them. The angel had charged the women to tell the apostles they were to go before Jesus into Galilee. They were runners of victory to announce the news of victory of Jesus. Bible praises those who run for Good News, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news?"

Someone may ask, "How does Jesus, who lived two thousand years ago in Palestine, relate to me, I who live in the United States in 2010 A.D.?" "Why should I consider Him?"

God says, "I know you." You asked, "Do you know me? How do you know me?"
God says, "I care for you." You ask, "Do you care for me? Why do you care for me?"
God says, "I call you." And, you ask, "Do you call me? How do you know my name?"

The Scripture says, "This is what the Lord says – he who made you, who formed you in the womb." Because I formed you I know you and your name. Because I formed you, I love you and care about you. Because I formed, you I select you and I call you. "You are mine. Do not be afraid, I will help you." (Isaiah 44:1-2)

I mentioned last Sunday, "To be the good news, the news should be related to me. Otherwise it is not good news for me"

The Bible tells us that you and I are included in God's ultimate plan. That is the Good News. "Christ lives, so you and I live" is the greatest message of Easter, because the Lord of resurrection includes you and me. You and I are included in God's chosen, calling, and sending. That's why we need shoes to run—run to deliver the great news of victory. We run for the Lord who will award us on that Great Day. We run for the honor and glory of God.

Don't talk a talk. Walk a walk. Wear your Nike's and walk a walk for bringing the good news. May your feet be beautiful for bringing the good news! May the greatest news reform you and transform your life!