

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Luke 24:13-35 on May 4, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Stonework

Today's Focus: Milestone

“Milestones to Maturity along the Journey”

If I'm here today preaching to you it means I survived my first half-marathon yesterday! How many of you have ever completed a half-marathon? 13. 1 miles. Before yesterday I'd never run that far before. In fact I only trained up to 6 miles—not even half way! But I made it. If you've ever run any distance race you appreciate all the milestones along the way, don't you? The mile markers themselves letting you know that you're making progress toward the goal. The water stations. The fans along the route cheering you on. The finish line up ahead.

And I was really glad also to have a teammate like Riley running alongside me as the two of us worked together to push Josh in the special My Team Triumph racing chair. Riley could've run ahead of me at any time and left me in the dust if he wanted to, but he stuck with me to help me make it to the end. All these things helped me complete the race even when at times I felt like giving up. I appreciated all the milestones on the journey. Way better than running on a “dreadmill” where your legs are moving and moving and moving but you don't seem to be getting anywhere, right? It's nice to have milestones helping us to move forward.

But what about when it comes to your faith journey? How do you know if you're making progress? What does it look like to reach spiritual maturity in Christ? What are some of the milestones along the way? Well today we have a great story from the Bible I think is going to help us answer some of these questions. We're going to look at the story of the Emmaus disciples. This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. And we're going to talk about **Milestones to Maturity along the Journey**.

The first milestone is this: **1) Jesus meets you where you're at.** Listen to this story from Luke 24 starting at verse 13: ¹³*Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.* ¹⁴*They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.* ¹⁵*As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;*

So what's going on? Well, it's Easter Sunday. The day Jesus rose from the dead. Yay, right? But hardly anyone knows this yet. So you've got these two men walking along the 7 mile road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They knew Jesus pretty well it seems, almost as well as the twelve apostles of Jesus themselves. And what are they talking about on their journey? They're talking about what happened to Jesus over the past week. Everybody was talking about it.

How Jesus was arrested. How he was flogged. How he was crucified. How he died. The things he said as he was dying. How the sky went dark. How there was an earthquake. How their confidence was shaken and their whole world turned upside down. And in the midst of this back and forth conversation, Jesus comes right alongside them. He meets them on their journey right where they're at.

And he doesn't just meet them right where they're at in terms of their physical location—although I think it's pretty neat that Jesus literally meets them on their journey and walks with them along the road. But he

also meets them in the middle of their feelings. Because they're on a spiritual journey too. Jesus meets them in the middle of their shock, their confusion, their hopelessness. He listens to them. Even though he's omniscient he lets them express what's on their minds. He lets them express what's on their hearts. He doesn't immediately tell them where they're wrong. He doesn't immediately try and set them straight. He empathizes with them. He meets them where they're at.

This is why the mission statement of our church says we want to love people enough to meet them where they are. Why? Because Jesus did. That's what he does with us too. Where were you when Jesus came alongside you in life? What were you thinking? How were you feeling? Maybe you were hurting. Maybe you were feeling hopeless. Maybe you were feeling worthless. Maybe you thought you had it all figured out on your own. Or maybe you had questions.

Or maybe he has always been alongside you even when you weren't always aware of it. Perhaps at your baptism Jesus came into your life even before you knew his name. He washed away your sins. He came into your heart. You didn't invite him. You didn't pray some special prayer. But he came alongside you because baptism is a work of God. It's welded to a divine promise. Jesus knew you even before you knew him. He was with you before you could call out his name. Yet he knew yours. Because here's the next milestone to maturity on the journey...

2) He hides himself from our sight. Listen... ¹⁵ *As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;* ¹⁶ *but they were kept from recognizing him.* ¹⁷ *He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.* ¹⁸ *One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*¹⁹ *"What things?" he asked.*

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ *The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;* ²¹ *but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.* ²² *In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning* ²³ *but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.* ²⁴ *Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."*

Peter and John were those two companions who ran to Jesus' tomb, but they didn't see Jesus at that time. These two disciples, one of them named Cleopas, who were on the road to Emmaus also didn't see Jesus even though he was right there walking along with them. Why? Because *they were kept from recognizing him*. God often hides himself from our sight. Seems a little odd at first, doesn't it?

Jesus shows up here alongside these men on their journey but he does so as the hidden God. The prophet Isaiah says, *Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel* (Isaiah 45:15). In other words he doesn't always show up to wow us in the ways we might normally think would be impressive to us. So he doesn't show up to the Emmaus disciples here just by blasting his glory to overwhelm them like "Here I am! Don't you see?" No, Jesus will reveal himself but on his own timeframe and in his own way. He could've just opened their eyes to recognize him from the get go. Instead he took the slow path.

He starts by meeting them where they're at. He then hides himself from their eyes and in so doing he invites their questions without providing all the answers right away. These disciples are hurting. They're wondering, "Why didn't God show up on Good Friday? Where was he when Jesus died? What is God's plan? What now for us all? Where does this journey lead?" Jesus lets them work through these difficult questions on their journey.

Friends, wouldn't you like to know all the answers to all your questions all the time on demand? This is how we human beings are. Thomas wanted to see too you'll remember. "Show me the evidence." So to we wonder sometimes, "Where are you God?" "What's your plan for my life?" You ever wish God would just show up and make himself known in a powerful way in your life?

But instead what does he do? Often he hides himself from our eyes. He doesn't reveal his plan all at once. He reveals his plans bit by bit. He takes us step by step down the path. He walks us slowly down the road of spiritual discovery, which leads us to our next milestone to maturity along the journey.

3) He reveals himself in the Scriptures. ²⁵ *He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

²⁸ *As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.*

²⁹ *But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.*

³⁰ *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.*

³¹ *Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

So Jesus purposefully kept them from seeing him. Why? Because they needed to see him first *and foremost* in his word. This is how God works. He often hides himself from our sight so that we can learn to live by faith in his Scriptures and not by sight with our eyes. Jesus first invites doubt without giving them answers. But then he calls them foolish and helps them find answers in the Scriptures, in the Bible. ²⁶ *Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

Isn't this interesting? Think of all the grand entrance kind of ways that Jesus could've revealed himself to them and yet what does he do? He first takes then step by step into the Bible. Genesis. Book #1. Adam and Eve fall into sin but instead of destroying them, God promises to send a Savior who will be born of a woman to one day crush the devil's power. Later Noah and his family are saved from destruction high upon the water in an ark that had one door that remains open for a time. Later Abraham is promised a child from whom one day will come a descendant through whom all nations on the earth will be blessed. Abraham believes God and his faith is credited to him as a gift of righteousness. Moses and the children of Israel are led across the Red Sea on dry ground. They escape slavery in Egypt. They are spared death because a lamb without blemish is killed in their place whose blood is smeared across their doorposts.

Who is the door? Who is Abraham's descendant? Who is the true Passover lamb? It's Jesus. All throughout the entire narrative of the Old Testament there are pictures, there are prophecies, there are people who pointed ahead to Jesus. Jesus is at the heart and center of the entire Bible. We talk about some of this more in my Bible 101 class. It's an eye opening journey of discovery. It's all about Jesus, true God and true man, who came to save people like us who were lost. **Jesus reveals himself in the Scriptures.**

I wonder if I were just to randomly ask you or ask people what makes a good sermon...what would you say? Or what makes someone a good preacher? I'm guessing the criteria people would use would be things like, "Was it interesting?" "Is the pastor likeable?" "Can he keep my attention or is he boring?" "Where there some good stories?" "Was he funny?" "Did he keep it short and not drone on and on?" "Was it helpful and practical?" Right?

Now those can all be elements of a good sermon. But you know what's most important to me in preaching a sermon? ... You see my goal isn't for you to go home saying, "Wow what a great preacher Pastor Ben is." Hey, if you think that, to God be the glory. But I'm pretty sure I'm going to have some off days when you don't think I'm that great and maybe today's one of them! But no, what I want most of all is for you to go home saying, "What a great Savior Jesus Christ is!" I want you to go home knowing him a little bit better from his word in the Bible.

So I will employ all my natural God given gifts to my sermonizing process. I will try and be clear. I will try and be relevant. I will try and meet you where you're at in terms of what you know and apply it to the world you actually live in. And I will try to bring all my best energy to deliver the best message that I can.

But I do so every week believing with all my heart that this isn't about me or how creative or clever I am. It's about being really clear about who Jesus is and what he has done. And I want to help you learn the Bible well so that you can see for yourself how every story whispers his name, how every passages sings his praise, how every text finds its beating heart in him. And in that way Jesus Christ must be the object of a good sermon. And I don't want to study the Bible just to impress you with my knowledge or my education but to impress upon your hearts the fullness of the gospel—that Jesus is your Savior, that you learn to read the Bible so that you see him more clearly, that you can talk about Jesus more capably, that you are freely motivated by Jesus. ³²*They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"* It wasn't just the realization that they actually saw Jesus that caused their hearts to burn with zeal for God. It was their realization that the Scriptures were opened up to them.

This is what gives me great hope as a pastor that my ministry can be a marathon and not a sprint. Did you know the average length of a pastor's career nationwide is 4 years? 1,700 pastors in our country quit every month. Burnout is huge because there is such pressure put on pastors by fickle people who evaluate sermons on the basis of the pop culture criteria. But I have so much comfort in Jesus and the Scriptures.

I still remember as a boy listening to Pastor John Jeske preach. It was a Christmas sermon at my home church at St. Luke's in Watertown. He said, "Marvel at the miracle in the manger." And he preached the gospel of how much God loves us that he would take on frail human flesh and blood, be born in a manger, and suffer and die...and I remember thinking, "Good God, here's this old man preacher and my heart has been set on fire." "How could he connect with me? He's like 60 years older than me." Well I know how.

Because he opened up the Scriptures and little by little he took me on a journey to see Jesus a little bit better and my heart burned within me.

What would it look like if we all experienced this on the journey to maturity? We'd get to the next milestone. **4) He makes us into missionaries.** ³³ *They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together* ³⁴ *and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."* ³⁵ *Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

This is just amazing. In this story we see not just a journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus but a journey from trauma to hope, from confusion to clarity, from aimlessness to purpose, and from immaturity to maturity. Just think how tired those Emmaus disciples must've been, how emotionally drained, but then they immediately turned around to go back to Jerusalem that same night. Why? Because now they understood from the Scriptures why Jesus had to die, what this all meant, that he died for their sins, that he was truly alive just as the Scriptures foretold. And that's when they couldn't help but become missionaries.

What happened? Jesus met these men where they were at. He then stayed with them long enough to help them grow in the Scriptures, walking right alongside them, until he brought them to where he wanted them to be, to be set on fire to confidently share it with others.

Friends, that's my vision for our church. Are we an evangelism church or a discipleship church? Are we an outreach church or an inreach church? Well let's not pit the two against each other. That'd be kind of like saying which wing of an airplane will you choose today when you fly...the right or the left? No, you have to have both and I think Jesus shows us how this works. He meets us where we're at in the Scriptures so that he can take us to where he wants us to be so that we can meet others where they're at along the way. You see what I mean? My vision is that we would become a church that makes disciples of Jesus who are so deeply saturated with the gospel of Jesus that it just naturally seeps into every aspect of people's lives transforming individuals, families, and neighborhoods. Let's keep going along this journey to maturity together with Jesus. Amen.

My Next Steps

Point to Ponder: God often hides himself from our sight so that he can reveal himself in the Scriptures. He wants us to learn to live by faith in the Scriptures and not by sight with our eyes.

Treasure to Share: *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"* (Luke 24:35).

Action to Take: Knowing key milestones can help you keep going on the journey. Do you have a daily Bible reading plan? If not, download The Bible app on your mobile device or computer and browse through the reading plans. Select one that you think will fit your pace and start tomorrow. Just give it a try! The app keeps track of your progress and helps show you the milestones along the way.