

"LESSONS FROM AN OLD STORY"

This is an able sermon & certainly to be helpful.

The structure is sound: the thought in sequence & the three points made clearly. Hearers would have no difficulty in following you & they would remember what you had to say.

On the whole, the sermon has too many illustrations, the result being that there is more light than depth. With fewer illustrations & more time given to the three points, especially point two, the sermon would be greatly strengthened.

Remember, in a sermon like this, the big question for the modern mind has to do with the questions — Did it actually happen?

PHILIP CLARKE
MARCH 7, 1961
UNION SEMINARY

LESSONS FROM AN OLD STORY

INTRODUCTION

The great stories of the Bible never grow old. They are like deep wells that never run dry. One of the greatest of them is Luke's story about the Walk to Emmaus. *San Francisco bellows around head* Most of you are familiar with it, therefore I'll tell it as briefly and as quickly as possible. Two friends of Jesus, two young men, were walking along the road that runs from Jerusalem to the little town of Emmaus, some seven miles to the north and west of Jerusalem. It was the Sunday following the crucifixion of our Lord. They were sad. They were groping their way along in the dark shadows of the cross when suddenly some one came up from behind them and joined them in their walk. It was Jesus, but they didn't recognize Him. He let them talk; He let them pour out their troubles to Him, and finally when they had unburdened their souls to Him, He began to talk to them. He talked to them about the Scriptures, about the Word of God, about the Truth, particularly the truth about suffering. And finally when they reached their destination, as it was evening, they invited Him to come in and have a meal with them. He accepted their invitation. During the meal He broke bread and gave it to them as He had done on other occasions, and of course when He did this, they recognized Him. And then, we are told, He mysteriously vanished from their sight. They were excited over what had happened, and they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others, and they were amazed when they got there to discover that something very similar had happened to those who had stayed behind in the city.

Entirely valid after, somewhat but guard against over-doing it The heart of the story is, of course, the presence of the risen Christ, and I'd venture to say that most of the sermons that have been preached from this story have gone right to that heart. But like most of the great stories of the Bible, this story has a fringe around it, and this afternoon, instead of going to the heart of the story I should like to take you around the fringes of it, lingering here and there in the margins, permitting some of its rich meaning to filter over into our lives. You might call this sermon: "Lessons from an Old Story", and I should like to suggest to you three thoughts that come to mind in connection with this story.

THE GREAT THINGS IN LIFE OFTEN COME A- LONG WHEN WE ARE LEAST EXPECTING THEM

The first thought that I would put before you is this: so often the great things in life come along when we are least expecting them, when we are not looking for them. Columbus, for instance, found this to be true. He wasn't looking for a new continent when he set sail from Genoa; he was simply looking for a new route to an old world. In a sense, we might say that he stumbled upon a new hemisphere. It reminds us too of Elizabeth Barrett. She wasn't looking for a husband when Robert Browning burst into her life. She was simply looking for the best kind of life possible as a semi-invalid. And then without any preparation, without any expectation on her part, there stood Robert Browning, like the rising sun, to change the whole course of her life.

Yes, so often the great and good things in life come along when we are least expecting them, when we are not looking for them. This holds true even in the area of our own personal relationships. Many

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of the great relationships in life are made not when we go out with a specific intention to make them, grimly determined to do so, but rather when we go along with our daily tasks doing the best that we can with life's situations. Sometimes these relationships creep up to us from behind and overtake us. I'm reminded of the way that I met my wife. It was a warm summer evening back in the year 1954. I was walking along Princes Street in Edinburgh, all alone, when suddenly an attractive brunette from America with a southern accent came up behind me and overtook me. (Of course, I'm sure that if she were here this afternoon, she would probably tell you that it was the other way around, ie, that I came up from behind and overtook her. I suppose it all depends on who's telling the story). But the point is this: so many things in life happen where you're least expecting them to happen. This is the way it was with these two young men walking along the road to Emmaus. They weren't looking for Jesus. As far as they knew, they had left him behind in Jerusalem sealed in a tomb. They weren't looking for him, but (and this is important to keep in mind) He was looking for them. Yes, we would do well to keep this other side of life in mind. Of course, it doesn't eliminate or cancel out the effort that you and I must make toward all the great things in life, but it does make the picture of life more complete when you remember that in addition to the effort and the striving that a person makes, life keeps coming up to you from behind, overwhelming you when you least expect it with things you never dreamed possible, supplementing your poor little efforts with its magnificent gifts.

It seems to me that the same sort of thing holds true when it comes to an experience with God in Christ. Some people find God in a discussion group under the auspices of the Church, or perhaps they find him in the classroom in college. I'm sure it all right to find God in such ways, but I'm sure that it is more likely to be true that a person finds God when he is standing on a street corner in a strange city feeling very much all alone, feeling like a lost soul. And suddenly there sweeps over him the feeling that he is not all alone in the universe. Or perhaps he feels God when he looks for the first time into the face of his first child, and in that strange little face of mystery he sees something of what the mystery of the universe is like. You see this sort of thing happens when a person is not expecting it to happen. It catches him off guard, and the thing is it makes life even more wonderful than it would be if we found only the things we were looking for in life!

note

WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE THE THINGS WE'RE LOOKING FOR

The second thought I would put before here this afternoon is this: isn't it true that sometimes we don't even see

Hubbard Johnson

the things we're looking at, or looking for, even when they pass right before our very eyes. In other words, we have blind spots. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. I remember a few years ago when quiz programs were at the peak of their popularity on TV, that a contestant was asked a question that had to do with the picture on the wrapping of a package of camel cigarettes. This was the question: "How many Arabs, one or two, are standing next to the camel in the picture that appears on the wrapper of a package of camel cigarettes?" The funny thing is this, that I've known men and women who have smoked camels for years and who have undoubtedly looked at that picture hundreds and hundreds of times puzzling over this question, some insisting that there is only one Arab, and others insisting that there are two Arabs next to the camel. Actually there

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are none! We often look at things without seeing anything at all.

These two friends of Jesus walking along the Road to Emmaus didn't see him at all. They were looking right at him, listening to Him, but they failed to recognize Him. We pause and wonder why? Some will say that His appearance had changed. As the risen Christ, He looked different to them than He had as a young carpenter. While there may be something in that, I suspect on the other hand that the real reason rests in this matter of inner blindness. They weren't prepared to see Him, and by and large we are not prepared to see many of the things that come our way. We are guilty at times of seeing only those things that we want to see, seeing only what we're looking for, and the things we're not looking for, we are not likely to see at all.

DISAPPOINTMENT IS OFTEN THE PRELUDE TO DISCOVERY

Now the third thought that we would do well to pin down in our thinking finds expression in this manner: disappointment more often than not is the prelude to discovery. Suffering is always the preface to glory.

You and I know from our experiences that disappointment and suffering can turn out to be something of a dead end in a person's life. You and I have known people who have experienced disappointment of one kind or another in the early years of life with the result that their entire life has turned sour. Put it this way: they have never outgrown their disappointment. But this particular story that we've been reflecting upon (here this afternoon) suggests to us a different side of life. These two young followers of Jesus had been bitterly disappointed. They had pinned all of their hopes on him. The times were bad, quite bad, and finally someone had come along who had raised their hopes, someone they could count on, and just when he was so close to realizing their hopes, he was killed. It appeared to be the end. And yet as we look back upon this story, this fact remains - that at the very time when they were most bitterly disappointed, they made their most startling discovery. At the very moment when they thought that all was lost, they found going along with them in a different sort of way, the very one upon whom they had pinned all of their hopes. Disappointment is often the prelude to discovery. We would do well to remember this as we go on from here.

It's dangerous and difficult for us to look back and analyze lives, and accomplishments of other people, but one can't help but be tempted by certain questions: where would Paradise Lost have been if Milton had never been blind? What would have happened to the Beethoven symphonies if Beethoven had not lost his hearing? Would Lincoln have been the kind of President that he was if his life had been entirely free from disappointment and suffering. Sometime when you feel that you have cause for discouragement, just remember some of these vital facts drawn from the life of one of the greatest men America has ever produced:

- 1831 - Lincoln failed in business.
- 1832 - He was defeated for the Illinois Legislature.
- 1833 - He again failed in business.
- 1834 - He was elected to the Legislature.
- 1835 - His sweetheart died.
- 1836 - He had a nervous breakdown.

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- 1838 - He was defeated for Speaker.
- 1840 - He was defeated for Elector.
- 1843 - He was defeated for Congress.
- 1843 - He lost in a race for Land Officer.
- 1846 - He was elected to Congress.
- 1848 - He was defeated for re-election.
- 1858 - He was defeated for the Senate.
- 1860 - He was elected President of the United States.

And one thinks of Phillips Brooks, who having failed as a teacher, turned to the ministry and who with the passing of time became one of America's greatest preachers. Coming nearer to our own time, what about Franklin Roosevelt? Would the leadership of our country have been different in the 1930s if Roosevelt had not been touched by polio in the 1920's? You see what I am attempting to bring out here is this that we see something of a pattern at work in all of this - the pattern of suffering and growth; the pattern of disappointment and creation. We grow through these experiences; there is no easy, smooth way by which we come to the great realizations of life.

Perhaps there is some one person in our midst today who is experiencing the depths of depression, some one person who may be discouraged with the way that things are going. Let me say this to you then. I realize that the consideration of all of these things is not going to make it any easier for you to bear your suffering, and yet at the same time I can't help but feel that if you will try to remember that disappointment is often the prelude to discovery, that suffering is more often than not a condition of growth, you will find that you are able to handle life much more creatively than you otherwise might. And somewhere in your thinking, as you depart from here today, try to keep this verse from Luke's Gospel with you: "And Jesus, himself, drew near and went with them" May He draw near to you, and may His spirit go with you as you return to the affairs of the world, and may the sense of His presence undergird your life and lead you to a deeper and richer life.

LET US PRAY: As we go along our way of life, Our Father, with its disappointments and sufferings, help us always to keep our eyes open so that we really see the things that are around us, and keep our spirits always alive to the fact that suffering can be the beginning of great things.

Teach us these things, O God, as we go on in the presence of Him, whom, though He be invisible, once showed mankind how to live. Amen

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INTRODUCTION

The great stories of the Bible never grow old. I suppose you might say that they're like the deep wells that never run dry. One of the greatest of them, I think, is Luke's story about the Walk To Emmaus. Most of you, I imagine are familiar with the story so I'll tell it as briefly as I can. Two friends of Jesus, two young men, were walking along the road that runs from Jerusalem to the little town of Emmaus some seven miles to the north and west of Jerusalem. It was the Sunday following the crucifixion of Jesus. They were sad. They were groping their way along in the dark shadows of the cross when suddenly some one came up from behind and joined them. It was Jesus, but they didn't recognize him. He let them talk; he let them pour out their troubles to him, and finally when they had unburdened their souls to him, he began to talk to them. He talked to them about the Scriptures, about the Word of God, about the truth, particularly the truth about suffering. And finally when they reached their destination as it was evening, they invited him to come in and have a meal with them. He accepted their invitation. During the meal he broke bread and gave it to them as he had done on other occasions, and of course when he did this they recognized him. And then, we are told, he mysteriously vanished from their sight. Of course they were excited over what had happened, and they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others and they were amazed when they got there to discover that something very similar had happened to those who had stayed behind in the city.

The heart of the story is, of course, the presence of the risen Christ, and I'd venture to say that most of the sermons that have been preached from this story have gone right to that heart. But like most of the great stories of the Bible, this story has a fringe around it, and this morning, instead of going to the heart and core of this story, I should like to take you around the fringes so to speak, lingering here and there in the margins, and permitting some of its meaning to filter over into our lives. You might call this sermon: "Lessons From an Old Story", and I should like to suggest to you four thoughts that spring from this story.

GREAT THINGS IN LIFE OFTEN COME WHEN WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR THEM

The first thought that comes to mind is this that the great things in life often come along when we are not looking for them. Columbus found this to be true. He wasn't looking for a new continent when he set sail from Genoa; he was simply looking for a new route to an old world. In a sense, we might say that he stumbled upon a new hemisphere. It reminds us too of Elizabeth Barrett. She wasn't looking for a husband when Robert Browning burst into her life. She was simply looking for the best kind of life possible as a semi-invalid. And then without any preparation and without any expectation on her part, there stood Robert Browning, like the rising sun, to change the whole course of her life.

It is true, is it not, that many of the discoveries that you and I make are often made that way. So many of the good things in life come along when we're not expecting them. It's true too of the relationships of life. So many of them are made not when we go out with a specific intention to make them, grimly determined to do so, but rather when we go along with our daily tasks doing the best that we can with the situations of life. So many of these relationships creep up to us from behind and overtake us. Somehow it reminds me

of the way I met my wife. It was a summer evening back in the year 1954. I was walking along Princes Street in Edinburgh, Scotland when suddenly an attractive brunette from America with a southern accent came up behind me and overtook me. (Of course, she might say it was the other way around, i.e., that I came up from behind and overtook her. I suppose it all depends on who's telling the story). The point is of course that so many things in life happen when you're least expecting them to happen. That's the way it was with these two young men walking along the road to Emmaus. They weren't looking for Jesus. As far as they knew, they had left him behind in Jerusalem sealed in a tomb. They weren't looking for him, but (and this is important) he was looking for them, and it's well for us to keep this other side of life in mind. Of course it doesn't eliminate or cancel out the effort that you and I must make toward all the great things in life, but it does make the picture of life more complete when you remember that in addition to the effort and the striving that a person makes, life keeps coming up to you from behind, overwhelming you when you least expect it with things you never dreamed possible, supplementing your poor little efforts with its magnificent gifts.

I suppose this same sort of thing is true when it comes to an experience with God. Some people, I know, find God in a discussion group under the auspices of the church, or perhaps they find him in a philosophy class in their sophomore class in college. I'm sure it's all right for us to find God in such ways, but I'm sure that it's more likely to be true that a person finds God when he is standing on a street corner in a strange city feeling all alone, feeling like a lost soul. Suddenly there sweeps over him the feeling that he is not all alone in the universe. Or perhaps he feels God when he looks at his first baby, and in that strange little face of mystery he sees something of what the mystery of the universe is like. This sort of thing often happens when a person is not expecting it to happen. It can catch him off guard, and the thing is that it makes life even more wonderful than it would be if we found only the things we were looking for.

WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE THE THINGS WE'RE LOOKING FOR

A second thought that we find resting in the margins of this beautiful old story finds expression in this fashion: we don't always

see the things we're looking for. That is to say that we have our blind spots. I remember a few years ago when quiz programs were at the peak of their popularity, a contestant was asked a question that had to do with the picture on the wrapping of a package of camel cigarettes. This was the question: "How many Arabs, one or two, are standing next to the camel in the picture that appears on the wrapper of a package of camel cigarettes?" The funny thing is this that I've know men and women who have smoked camels for years and who have looked at that picture hundreds and hundreds of times puzzling over the question, some insisting of course that there is only one Arab, and other insisting that there were two Arabs next to the camel. Of course, there is none at all. It's just a simple illustration of the fact that we often look at things without seeing anything at all.

These two young friends of Jesus walking along the Road to Emmaus didn't see him at all. They were looking right at him, listening to him, but they failed to recognize him. We pause and wonder why? Some will say that his appearance had changed. As the risen Christ, he looked different to them than he had as a young carpenter. While there may be something in that, I suspect that the real reason rests in this matter of inner blindness. They weren't prepared to see him, and by

and large, we're not prepared to see many of the things that come our way. We see pretty much what we're looking for in life, and the things we're not looking for, we are not likely to see at all.

DISAPPOINTMENT IS OFTEN
THE PRELUDE TO DISCOVERY

A third lesson that we would do well to pin down in our thoughts that grows out of this story is this: disappointment more often than not is the prelude to discovery. Suffering is always the preface to glory.

As you know, disappointment and suffering can turn out to be something of a dead end in a person's life. You and I have known people who have experienced disappointment of one kind or another in the early years of life with the result that their entire life has turned sour. In a sense, they have never outgrown their disappointment. We've seen people suffer in different ways at different times and never survive. But this particularly story that we've been reflecting upon here this morning suggests a different side of life. These two young followers of Jesus had been bitterly disappointed. They had pinned all of their hopes on him. The time were bad, quite bad, and finally someone had come along who had raised their hopes, someone they could count on, and just when he was so close to realizing their hopes, he was killed. And yet as we look back on this story, there is this fact, isn't there - that at the very time when they were most bitterly disappointed, they make their most startling discovery, and at the moment when they thought all was lost, they found going along with them in a different sort of way - the very one upon whom they had pinned their hopes. Disappointment is often the prelude to discovery. We need to remember this at all times.

In the town where I grew up there was a family who had a son whom they wanted above all else to be a doctor. He too wanted to study medicine, and he went through four years of college, and entered medical school. He continued there for two years and at the beginning of the third year, he was dropped from the school because of low grades. I remember how that family was plunged into disappointment, and how the boy himself came very close to having a mental breakdown. I remember how those who knew the family and understood what had happened tried to carry them through that difficult experience, and it's of great interest to know that that same boy, no longer a boy, is now a very successful teacher in one of the small New England colleges teaching biology. In other words, at the very point of his disappointment, he made a discovery of what God really wanted him to do. As you know the pages of history and biography are filled with examples of this very thing. One thinks of Phillips Brooks, who having failed as a teacher, turned to the ministry and became one of America's greatest preachers. We think too of people who have gone through the agony of disappointment in love or in marriage. It's a terrible thing to watch, much less to bear. But the disappointment in some cases, doesn't last forever, and in some cases the very shock of disappointment turns the person in another direction which leads straight to the haven of perfect love.

It's dangerous and difficult for us to look back and analyze the lives and accomplishments of other people, but one can't help but be tempted by certain questions: What would have happened to the Beethoven symphonies if Beethoven had never been deaf? Where would Paradise Lost have been if Milton had never been blind? Would Lincoln have been the kind of president that he was if his life has not been touched with disappointment and suffering. And nearer to our own times, what about

Franklin Roosevelt? Would the leadership of our country have been different in the 30s if Roosevelt had not been touched by polio in the 20s? What I'm attempting to say is something like this that we see something of a pattern in all of this - the pattern of suffering and growth; the pattern of disappointment and creation. We grow through the experiences; there is no easy, smooth way by which we come to the great realizations of life.

I realize the consideration of this fact isn't going to make it any easier for some of you to bear your suffering, and yet I think if you will remind yourself from time to time when these experiences come to you that disappointment is often the prelude to discovery, and suffering more often than not is a condition of growth, you will find that you're able to handle them more creatively than you otherwise might.

ACTION SPEAKS LOUDER
THAN WORDS.....

The fourth lesson suggested by this story is simply this that actions speak louder than words. The two friends of Jesus finally recognized him, but not by anything he said, but by what he did. It was when he broke the bread and gave it to them that they knew him. And it's always been so. Surely no one would underestimate the power and beauty of the things he said, but it wasn't what he said so much that touched the lives of men. It was what he did. It wasn't the fact that he talked eloquently about forgiveness of our enemies that reached the hearts of people; it was the fact that he demonstrated it. It wasn't so much that he talked about mingling with all sorts and kinds of people; it was the fact that he was a friend of publicans and sinners. He didn't talk about sacrifice; he practiced it.

This is worth remembering too, although it isn't always a pleasant thing for us to be reminded of, but it is true, is it not, that we reveal what we are more by what we do than by what we say. A parent doesn't reveal himself to his child by what he says, but rather by what the child sees him do. And when you and I stop to realize that all of our words, all of our eloquent promises and professions made to people in public and to individuals in private and allowing for all the good that they do, really are nothing unless they are confirmed and backed up by action, it brings us to our knees. Perhaps that is good, ie, we need to be brought to our knees from time to time and realize that our prayers mean nothing unless they touch our lives and result in some action. This perhaps is where the sermon should end too, here with you and me, realizing how often we fall short and how far we have to go in this matter of growth and in this process of maturing.

CLOSING SECTION

But before we end, let me just bring it all together here in a few sentences and tie together the various threads of thought: remember first that the great things of life often come when we're not looking for them, second, that we don't always see the things we're looking at, third, that disappointment is often the prelude to discovery, and fourth, that our actions speak louder than our words. And Jesus, himself, drew near and went with them. May his presence draw near to you, and may his spirit go with you as you depart from this place, and may it lead you and guide you along those paths that lead to a richer, fuller and more satisfying life. Let Us Pray:

As we go along our way of life, Our
Father, with its disappointments and
its sufferings, help us always to keep
our eyes open so that we really see the
things that are around us, and keep our
spirits always alive to the fact that
disappointment and suffering can be the
beginning of great things.

Teach us these thing, O God, as we go
on in the presence of him, whom, though
he be invisible, once showed mankind
how to live. Amen

* realizing how often we fall short, and how far we have
to go in this matter of Christian growth and in this
matter of becoming mature citizens in a responsible
Christian society.

Yes....for lessons from an old story, remember them if
you will, but above all remember this one verse from
this story: "And Jesus himself drew near and went
with them".....

May he draw near to you, and may his presence, his
spirit go with you as you return to the affairs of
the world, and may his spirit undergird your life
and lead you to a richer, fuller and more satisfying
life. Let us Pray....