

This brief encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus is, in a nutshell, a primer about faith—freshman level course—*Faith 101!* Now let's take a journey of our own. If you listened to the news on Friday, you may have come to realize how old you are—when reminded it was already 40 years ago that date—or how young when you related to the event as a piece of history you learned about in school. Friday was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For me, it was another nudge on the realization-side of things—somehow I must be 40 whole years older than I was when I remember clearly the news of Dr. King's death coming into our home on the big, console TV; I can see that picture as he lay fallen on the motel balcony. It was numbing news; unsettling news; it was a tragically sad moment for this nation.

Now there was a man of faith. Yes, he was a minister, so you would expect that his faith in God was very much a part of his life; in fact, so much so, I believe, that he could do no other thing than expose his life as he followed his “dream;” as if equality in this nation had to be a dream for anyone. Martin Luther King Jr. had a faith in God that let him “see” a world that was “one” in respect for one another; in opportunity; in securing justice; a world different from the one that is still struggling to walk truthfully hand-in-hand with one another but so much closer than we were 40 years ago. He gave his life to that vision—just as Gandhi had; as he was propelled to lift his voice against segregation by the force of the faith that coursed through his veins.

I don't know the story of Dr. King's faith. I do know his father was a minister before him. But at some point in his life, he had an encounter with God that became the driving force in his life. That's the way of faith—of coming to belief in God. His faith became the defining character of who he was and what he did in life; his faith in God as revealed through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And I know we have not been called into the course of history to the same extent as Rev. King was, but faith can be for us, the same—the defining character of who we are and what we do in life; how we live our lives as we respond to the force of faith coursing through our veins. So where do we begin? Where does this life-giving, life-driving moment begin; and just as important—once begun, where is it sustained, that it endures?

For each one, I would say on the road to Emmaus, so-to-speak. It begins right there with the walking journey those two men were on—Cleopas and his unnamed companion. They weren't sitting around trying to figure out life; let life come to them. They were on the move—literally; on their way somewhere. They had their minds engaged as well; as they discussed what they knew about Jesus. That would be step one—to be stepping; to be thinking; to be wondering about life and events and where we fit in to it all. Wrap it all up and say “seeking,” but let that word be comprehensive enough that you don't pigeon-hole where that search will end.

Step two. It jumps right out at everyone who reads this text. Your way along crosses the path of someone who causes you to hear God's words for life in a way that you understand. Those words are there all the time—in this Bible; have been for over 2500 years; and the wonder of belief is that they do come alive at some point as suddenly the “thou” and “thee” becomes “me” and “you” right here and now. Cleopas, Peter, Mary and John had those words available to them all their lives—the books of Moses and the prophets. It was Jesus himself who pulled the *thee* and *thou* out of the script and put flesh and blood on them. It is the same for everyone yet today. These living words of the Bible are for us are the springboard of our belief when we finally begin to understand

them. It won't happen if we don't pick up the Bible and read it; if we don't expose ourselves to listening to its interpretation. Understanding comes with prayer and study and discussion. And understanding opens up a whole new path in life called commitment. Commitment brings us into community; whether walking with another along a dusty road, or rushing back to the company of friends. The search is kicked up a notch as you come to step 3.

Step 3 will bring us to the rituals. There are two basic components to step 3: the first being drawn into fellowship with others—other believers. There is a desire to come to worship; to experience a connection with God that is found with others as you pray together and sing together and together read and listen to an interpretation of the word. And together, you will share the Lord's Supper—Christian believers continue to share the meal Christ commended to us: *do this, as you remember me*, he said. *Do this*; and we do, following his example; have done it for 2000 years. And even if we cannot fully define all that the supper is about, we continue to share our belief in Christ this way and within that desire or willingness and sometimes even in response as a duty, you will encounter Christ in a way that you probably cannot explain; but it is a presence—a change of heart—a notion of mind that has a real effect for you. That is the other basic component of the rituals—the God component, as God touches our lives through the lively person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit—present in this time and place—the mystery of the Divine touching the reality of life. It was in the ritual of just sitting down to an evening meal together that Cleopas and his companion realized that Jesus was right there with them. There in the fellowship; there in the breaking of the bread as he had done before with them, the circle of understanding became complete; *and their eyes were opened*; and you might add, their lives were forever changed as their faith in the movement of God in this life became real. Belief took over their lives; ended their wandering; sent them packing with a definite mission. They couldn't even wait for the next day. They didn't go to bed for the night. They set off right then and there and returned to their friends to tell them what had happened to them. And that has to be step 4 in the encounter with this life-giving, life-sustaining business of faith in life.

It is not the final step; step 4. There is never a final step as we live our lives with the reality of understanding God is ever in the midst of them. But it is an evident piece of realizing that God is a part of your life. Faith in Christ—in the love of God for you, is not a private thing to be kept to yourself. Your relationship with God is private; is personal; is intimate; is meant for you and God alone; but because of that relationship, how you live your life will affect that public part of you. That is where your faith becomes a part of life around you; known to your friends; to your spouse; to your family; known where you work; a part of all you do; how you take care of life and you. Faith steps right out and calls you to proclaim what you know; guides what you do; how you do it; what you say; in other words, faith defines the character of each and every believer each and every common day.

Now throughout, as this text clearly states, it is the gracious hand of God that is ever at work in changing the world; in changing the lives of those who find belief in Christ; those who come to know that God's love for them is real. There in the opening story, those two travelers did not recognize Jesus when he walked with them because *there eyes were kept from recognizing him*. It was after making the connection in their minds as the Scriptures were “opened” to their understanding there in the midst of

sharing bread with Jesus that the story relates their *eyes were opened* and they knew who Jesus was. That is how it happens—this knowledge of God in our lives. Belief comes from God. It is God who enables us to “hear” in a way of understanding; who draws us into the fellowship of believers; who gives us the “faith” to reach out and share bread and wine and remember the gift of Christ in this world; it is God who enlivens our own personalities to embrace the teachings of Christ—of these Scriptures and brings definition to our lives as we reach out to others and become witnesses of what we know. It’s God’s work—this business of belief coming, yet we are a part of that work as we engage with life and search; as we respond or not to the tugging on our souls; as we continue to stay the course of faith and deepen our relationship with God.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a man of faith, and because of that, he changed the world as he followed the path his faith led him along. Cleopas, dear Mary, fiery Peter—they were all people of faith and the world changed as their faith defined who they were and what they would do. It is the same for every believer. Life is changed when God’s love is revealed. First it is changed for every believer. Your life will never be the same as it was before you came into a relationship with God. The Spirit of God becomes a part of you: God the Creator; Redeemer; Sustainer—all those attributes of God become a part of who we are and send us restlessly into the world; to right wrongs; to stand against injustice; or maybe to live simple lives heroically every day, bringing honor to the Name of God in very ordinary, unheralded ways. Let’s celebrate that—the life of faith God calls us to, as we come in faith to this Table. Let’s celebrate the grace that fills our days, as God fulfills this day’s measure of redemption seen or heard or felt through us. Come do this, remembering Christ will change the world for the better through you. Amen.

“Changing the World” Luke 24:13-35 040608 Mkh