

You'll notice in your bulletin a little diagram showing the parallel structure of the Road to Emmaus story that we have as our gospel lesson for today. I pointed this out in the sermon I preached on this text six years ago; and assuming you don't remember my every sermon from the last six years I've decided to show this again.

You'll see by looking at the diagram that while the story is presented in a way that flows chronologically, there is also this set of parallels. This technique is quite common in the Bible. Many ancient stories use this technique. You may remember from the Old Testament series we did last summer that we looked at several of these.

When you come across these parallels, sometimes called a chiasmus, you realize that not only are you to learn from the words of the story, but the structure of the story is teaching you something too. Usually the key part of the story is not the end, but what is found in the middle. Let's look at each of the parallels in our gospel reading as we approach the center.

The outermost parallel is A and A': Journeying from Jerusalem and Journeying to Jerusalem. We have these two disciples, one named Cleopas, one unnamed, they have witnessed what happened with Jesus on Good Friday. Their faith in him has been shattered. Their hopes and dreams have been dashed. They have decided to go home and rethink everything in their lives. Then they hear about the empty tomb. It is a wonderful vision, but too wild to be believed. As they journey from Jerusalem they are drifting from their hopes and from the community of people who believed in Jesus. Returning to Jerusalem at the end means they have returned to hope and community.

Next we have B and B', appearance and disappearance of Jesus. It has always been a puzzle as to why these two guys don't recognize Jesus. He doesn't look different does he? How come his friends don't know it's him? But the text isn't prepared to answer these questions. The point it wants to get across is that: by human sight, by human reason, or by human reason a person cannot get to God. Faith is God's work. There is no number of proofs I can create to make someone believe. There is no work I can do that will ensure someone will

recognize the love of Christ. Only by God's act, only by God's revelation can someone know God and recognize Christ.

The text tells us their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus. It was God's work, both the lack of recognition and the eventual recognition. Why? I don't know. God alone knows.

If there is any part of this story that is a challenge for us I think it is here. This is the challenge to accept God's ways. There are lots of things in this world I would change if I could. And there are lots of good, selfless, loving things I would accomplish if I could, but I can't. I've tried, and it just doesn't work. This passage challenges me to recognize that my role is to continue to love and pray and work; and let the rest up to God. Ultimately that means I don't get to take credit for bringing someone to know Christ. It isn't a feather in my cap. Nor am I solely responsible when someone doesn't come to know Jesus. I shouldn't feel guilty or give up in failure. It is God's work, not mine. Only by God's revelation can God be known.

Next we have C and C': interaction with Jesus. It is walking and talking at the beginning, and talking and breaking bread at the end. Here we learn that there is nothing supernatural or miraculous about spending time with the risen Lord. His presence comes in the ordinary acts of life: walking, talking, eating; or grocery shopping, going to work, or playing with friends.

Don't expect there to be lightning bolts or miracles everywhere when Christ is present. There could be, but their probably won't be. In this gospel reading the text is almost like a daily diary of someone who's had an ordinary day - almost. Recognizing Jesus changes all that! But for the most part it is all very ordinary.

Next is D and D', a summary of "the things". A new life in Christ is not simply a reiteration of one's old ideas. It calls for a complete reorientation of all of one's thoughts and ideas about everything! These disciples are neither blind because they didn't recognize Jesus, nor are they thick headed or stupid because they don't understand. Rather, they are being asked to

upend everything they ever believed about everything (God' included) so they can re-center their lives on the resurrection.

Christianity, and the resurrection in particular, is not just a set of beliefs that you incorporate into your world view. It *is* your world view. It is the reality you build everything else upon. Death is not the end. Eternal life of goodness and joy is promised. With that as the source, then judge everything else around you. Let that promise guide the way you understand everything else.

In E and E' we have the empty tomb. Just like the Appearance/Disappearance teaching we find in B and B' we have the same thing here. Evidence does not create faith. The women saw the empty tomb and were enlightened by the words of the angels or men sent by God. Peter and the others who saw the empty tomb did not see the angels. In the case of the women, evidence plus divine messengers created faith and belief. In the case of the disciples, evidence but no divine guidance, left them confused. Only later when they too recognize Jesus will they come to have faith. Again, it is all God's work so that we

may neither boast nor worry. The one who promises us eternal life also holds us in his supernatural confidence.

Finally we have the center of the story - Jesus is alive! This is the most important point and the entire story revolves around this point. If there was no resurrection this story would just be two disappointed guys walking home. With the resurrection all the momentum of the first half of the story is turned around.

And that is the key point for our lives too. The resurrection was not an event that happened a long time ago in a land far away. Easter is not over at sundown on Easter Sunday, a truth not to be revisited until the holiday rolls around again. It stretches into the rest of our lives. Life would never be the same. Living resurrection hope is the turning point in our lives. Some might call it a conversion experience. All the rest of the story in our gospel and all the rest of the story of our life is an extension of the Easter reality: The Lord is risen and he comes to meet us on the road to Emmaus and in many ways big and small in our lives' journeys.

May the promise of the resurrection be the key point in your lives - the energy force, the driving force, the source of joy and the source of hope which flows through everything you do. Amen

#### Parallel Structure in Luke 24:13-35 – The Road to Emmaus

A Journey from Jerusalem (vs. 14-15)

B Appearance, “Obstructed Eyes,” Lack of Recognition (vs. 16)

C Interaction with Jesus; walking and talking (vs. 17-18)

D Summary of “the things” (vs. 19-21)

E Empty Tomb and Vision (vs. 22-23a)

F Jesus is Alive (vs. 23b)

E’ Empty Tomb, but No Vision (vs. 24)

D’ Interpretation of “the things” (vs. 25-27)

C’ Interaction with Jesus; talking and breaking of bread (vs. 28-30)

B’ Opened Eyes, Recognition and Disappearance (vs. 31-32)

A’ Journey to Jerusalem (vs. 33-35)