

**FROM THERE TO HERE**  
**April 6, 2008, The Rev. Charles Helsabeck**  
Luke 24:13-35; Acts 2:14a, 36-41

By this time many of you know that Barack Obama is a member of Trinity UCC in Chicago and that the pastor of Trinity UCC used to be the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. You also may know that Barack Obama has been under attack by some for some of the things Jeremiah Wright has said from the pulpit. I have no idea what provocative things I may have said in the past. Neither do I know what you might hear if you play my sermon backwards. So, anyone wishing to run for president of the USA may want to leave the sanctuary at this time.

In light of the media coverage of these stories I think it is helpful to ask what are we called to be as a people called to follow Christ to the cross. This question also must have seemed quite urgent to the travelers in today's reading from Luke's Gospel.

The UCC took out an ad in the *NY Times* this week to try to answer this question at a denominational level. The ad says in part, "We are a risk-taking church, because ours is a risk-taking God." And, "We support liberty in our pulpits, just as we affirm the individual conscience of our 1.2-million members to agree, disagree and wrestle with life's biggest questions in a spirit of love."

The followers of Jesus had a more difficult association to deal with than Barack Obama has with Rev. Wright. They had to deal with the fact that their leader, the one who had spoken to them about the breaking in of the Kingdom of God, had been executed as a political threat. The two on the journey to Emmaus mentioned in today's scripture lesson were two of those followers.

I find it difficult to come up with an analogous example from today. The closest I could come up with were the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, Jr. Devastating as those were they were, they were not publicly executed by the government as political enemies. The association with King, or with the Kennedys, did not automatically pose the threat of execution to any of their followers. Society, that is the Roman society and that was the society that mattered in the early first century, had declared that Jesus' message was dangerous to society.

It is no wonder these two travelers from Jerusalem were talking and discussing while they walked. It is not surprising to me that they were so distraught that they did not recognize Jesus when he joined them. It is not the least bit surprising to me that when asked what they were discussing, they stopped, stared in disbelief and answered, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" What things!? "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." And here they were walking to Emmaus hoping to find some solace from the shock and horror and disbelief that they had experienced in Jerusalem.

I cannot imagine the feelings these two must have had when they heard the things that had

passed in Jerusalem, but I do know what it is like to be on a journey seeking solace from the realities of life's "veil of tears."

I do not know what it is like to lose a child fortunately all of mine are still alive. But I once sat with a couple who had lost a son about 4 years old, the same age as Nathan at the time. Even that close to their grief left me shaken. Just being that close to their grief was enough for me to need to seek solace once they left.

I vividly experience the pain of being with people who have suffered at the hands of an unjust society when I travel to Guatemala. The first year that I went I felt so bad I thought that somehow I should repent because of my privileged life. I should somehow suffer myself for these people who have endured so much at the hands of the privileged. But there was nothing I could do except work with them to build a school and share some laughter, some confusion, and some meals with them. Then come home to seek some solace. I have returned each year since then because my memory of those people dims with time and I want to be reminded again what innocent suffering is like and how they do not have the time to wallow in self-pity but they rejoice in their faith for the future.

I have been with people who suffer from the calamity of homelessness. Whether it is from mental illness, addiction, or just an unfortunate loss of a job, homelessness leaves them wandering and looking and searching for a place to call home. I attended a funeral of one of Corvallis' homeless men this week. The people who were at the service were some of the homeless, some who had worked with him, and his mother, son and daughter. In that grief filled sanctuary I was reminded that he was a son to someone who loved him and he was a parent to two teens who grieve his loss.

"Life is difficult," Dr. Scott Peck said in the opening sentence of his book *The Road Less Traveled*. I agree with that statement and I enjoyed reading the book but I disagree with his second premise when he says, "With total discipline we can solve all problems." Granted the discipline he goes on to elaborate on includes some good ideas, but I disagree that we can solve all problems. History and current events teaches me otherwise.

What I do believe is that we can find solace even though we may need to journey to find solace. I am not necessarily talking about a physical journey but at least an emotional journey. I believe that once we experience loss or change our lives are altered and we have to adjust to being someone new. And some of the journeying can take quite a while.

In high school, as some of you know, the car I was driving was struck head-on by a car driven by a drunk driver. At the time I thought I wanted to study physics. Now I am still wondering what I'll do when I grow up. I have been divorced, unemployed, and under the care at points in my life for different aches, pains, and mishaps. I have been on the journey from my "Jeruselems" of confusion, doubt, and hurt and I know that I don't like to be there. But I also know that I can find an Emmaus if I just keep looking.

There are enough Jerusalem-places for everyone but what about Emmaus-places?

Often my Emmaus-place has been the church. Sometimes it has been difficult for me to enter into the comfort of the solace of the church either because I felt too bad to go in or because I could not readily find a church of comfort. I heard one person say that some churches are full of "frozen people." I cannot find solace in a church with "frozen people."

Martin Buber in his book *Good and Evil* suggests that some people can "gravitate toward piety for the disguise and concealment that it can offer. . ." I cannot find solace in places where people seek disguise and concealment.

But I can find solace in a church that gathers around the Lord's Table as fellow seekers. I can find solace in a place with people who know Jesus in the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup. I can find solace in such a place because in those places I know that I gather around the table with people just like me, people on a journey - fellow travelers. It is a place where sorrow shared is halved and joy shared is doubled.

The scripture passage from today does not end in a nice little feel-good Kodak moment. Once they recognize Jesus they realize that they have to go back to Jerusalem. Go back to the place that has caused them so much trouble. Go back there. Go back and tell others what they have seen and heard. Go back and spread the good news that Christ is alive and we can find solace in the Body of Christ. Justice, mercy, compassion, life, forgiveness, reconciliation rule. No longer do we have to live in fear or sorrow. Jesus has shown us the way out.

It is possible. Strange as it might sound, we can find solace with a people who are fed at His table with scrap of bread dipped in a cup of grape juice. Something magical can happen. We are fed when we are hungry. We are given drink when we are thirsty. We are clothed when we are exposed. We are set free from the events that bind us.

But then we have to go back to our Jerusalems-of-suffering. We are free to say with Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Lk. 4:18-19)

We can recognize Jesus in the eating and drinking at His Table. Come to Emmaus. Find the comfort that you need. Then go back to those dark places and spread the Light of good news.