

Bilbo Baggins, Tolkien's famed Hobbit, sings the following as he sets out from his home in *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

*The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.*

Whether the road begins in Middle Earth, in the deep space of Star Trek “boldly going where no one has gone before,” in a blue police box of Dr. Who that never stays in one place or time for long, or “a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away,” the vision of life as a journey resonates deeply within us.

We are a pilgrim people, and during this season of Lent, we're going to tag along on one of the great journeys of the Bible. A distance of 7 miles isn't very far, but the spiritual distance that Cleopas and his companion cover on the road to Emmaus continues to inspire us and to invite us to take that next step that may make all the difference; that step that joins our journey with “some larger way” that leads us from dark to sight.

“The two disciples begin their journey from Jerusalem perplexed, disappointed, discouraged, and, most of all, sorrowful. They're perplexed that such a good and innocent man was suddenly and brutally murdered, disappointed that the dream of messianic peace had not been realized, discouraged by the sudden end to their path as followers of their teacher, and grieved by the tragic loss of their faithful friend. But that's not all. Rumors had been started by some women who had gone to the tomb that very morning. They said that the tomb had been opened, the body was gone, and angels told them that Jesus was alive. It was all too much—the two had to get out of town. As they walk they try to make sense of it all.¹”

The disciples sorrow is all-too-familiar to us. The journey of our lives is a journey of coming to terms with the distance between our hopes and dreams and our

¹ Tony Mann, “From Dark to Sight: A Lenten Journey” in *Reformed Worship* (December 2013/Number 110) 5.

reality. “[Hopes and dreams] we have for our families, for our careers, and for our future fall through because of circumstances outside our control, causing significant disappointment. Injury, illness, or declining health discourage us. Broken marriages or wayward children cause confusion and heartache. Injustices we encounter in our personal or professional lives frustrate us. While untimely deaths can cause confusion and anger, the death of any loved one can bring an indescribable sense of loss. But in the midst of these dark realities we can experience an inexplicable sense of light and hope.”² Our sorrowful searching can lead us from dark to sight.

How? How in the name of all our sorrow dare we make such a claim? How can we avoid the sanctimonious blasphemy of a pious cliché?

Sometimes in Scripture, significant details are hidden in plain sight. We overlook the obvious, and the obvious and significant detail is that the road to Emmaus is never walked alone. *Luke 24:13–14 (NRSV)*¹³ *Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,*¹⁴ *and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.*

We live in a culture that is obsessed with the individual; we want to go it alone and pull up our own bootstraps. That is a dream that quickly becomes a nightmare! We keep our mouths shut and our hearts closed. We search for a way around our sorrow; we distract ourselves – what’s on channel 946? Who’s updated their status on Facebook? We text. We tweet; anything to avoid paying attention. We numb ourselves, because if we don’t feel, we can’t hurt – right? We search for a way around, but there is no way around sorrow; we can only go through it, and on that journey “one is the loneliest number that you’ll ever do.”

We need each other for our sorrowful searching to bear fruit. All our griefs can weigh heavy upon us, but as Ecclesiastes reminds us, *Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV84)* *Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.* Many of us know this first hand. It may be the single most cherished calling of the Church; we will walk the road with you; we will search with you in the midst of the sorrow for the way that leads to believe and

² *Op cit.*

dream again. We will endure the darkness with you in hope of discovering the light.

The second significant detail is another blow against our self-centered idolatry: The two disciples have all the facts and none of the faith. The light of resurrection has dawned; the disciples report: *Luke 24:22–23 (NRSV) Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.*

They know, but they don't know; and when a mysterious third companion joins them on the road, he's a stranger to them: *Luke 24:18 (NRSV) ... "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"*

If God were not gracious and merciful, this would be where our Lenten journey ends – with God a stranger and our sorrowful searching all for nought; but our sorrowful searching is not for nought; it abounds with opportunity and possibility! Our sorrowful searching opens us to the grace and mercy God would show us; it turns our gaze away from the things that keep our eyes from recognizing Jesus in our midst. He is with us! He is always with us, but Jesus doesn't impose himself on us; he isn't a rude guest; he waits for the right moment when we are ready for the light to shine in our lives, and when that moment arrives, he shines!

I'm not saying that God allows these things to happen or causes our sorrow so that we will know his grace and mercy. I suspect the reality is far richer and more complex than that. I can't offer answers; I can bear witness to what I have seen and to what you have told me you have seen: When the journey is hard and the darkness deep, the light is about to shine. When our dreams are dust, our hopes dashed, the light is about to shine. When Jesus is a stranger, and our answers only lead to hard questions, the light is about to shine. We cannot cause it to shine. We cannot compel it to shine, but thanks be to God, grace and mercy are revealed in response to our sorrowful searching, and we know we are not alone. We know we're on the way. We know we can hope and dream again.

Leonard Cohen sang this well in his "Anthem:"

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

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That's how the light gets in.³

We journey from dark to sight through our sorrowful searching. Amen.

³ <http://www.leonardcohen.com/us/music/futureten-new-songs/anthem>