



EASTERTIDE 2021

“Seeing Jesus”

Luke 24:13-35

“And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.”

The Highland Vision Task Force wants to include sharing the good news of Jesus in Highland’s set of core values

The vision of **Saturate the Sound**: *every man, woman, and child having a daily encounter with Jesus where we live, work, learn, and play*

The difference between an encounter with Jesus and an account of Jesus: the two kinds of knowing, the blind date phenomenon with Ethel and Fred, and Job’s: *I had heard of you, but now my eyes see you* (42:5)

Can our mandate to be witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8) actually include facilitating encounters with Jesus?

Insights from the Road to Emmaus Conversation:

Principle One: *“Two of them were going”* (v. 13). Jesus appears to the normal Joes before the twelve, which reminds us anyone and everyone is eligible for a personal encounter with Jesus! The mosaic is:

Rowan LeCompte (American, 1925–2014) and Irene Matz LeCompte (American, 1926–1970), *Third Station of the Resurrection: The Walk to Emmaus, 1970. Mosaic, Resurrection Chapel, National Cathedral, Washington, DC. Photo: Victoria Emily Jones*

Principle Two: *“Jesus Himself drew near and went with them”* (v. 15)

We go where people are, we enter into their conversation, we ask questions, we walk beside them where to wherever they are walking. The game is not played in Sunday Church. That is now the coaching session!

Principle Three: “*In all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (v. 27)

Making sure we keep the main thing the main thing (or “first things first”) in our witness. It can be easy to see Christianity (the system) as the main headliner, of which Jesus is an important part. But this is to get it backwards. The Christian system is all about pointing to and explaining Jesus, and we never want our zeal for the Bible or for theology to actually get in the way (by introducing confusion or initial resistance for all sorts of reasons) of people first meeting Jesus.

Jesus identified a problem with the zealous Jews of His day who loved the Law, but were unable to see that it was meant to lead them to Him: *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life* (John 5:39-40). It is more important that people are helped to see/encounter the person of Jesus before needing to process Christianity’s theological system. And while for some an encounter with Jesus may happen precisely through grappling with the theological system, explaining the theological system is not logically necessary to being able to encounter Jesus. The first priority is to meet Jesus. What follows after meeting Jesus is the desire to know Him better, which leads to an exploration of the amazing mosaic of meanings in the arc of Biblical revelation, something that takes a lifetime to study and understand.

Furthermore, if we feel we must start with the mechanics of Christianity or the theological system (i.e. Jesus came to die for the world’s sin, or the fall of Genesis affected everything, or Jesus is God, part of the Holy Trinity, or the flesh, the devil and the world, etc.), we often find ourselves trying to simplify that system so the uninitiated will get the gist of it. But often it doesn’t help to oversimplify that theological system in an attempt to persuade someone to pursue Jesus, as simplification can easily lead to distortions or unhelpful shortcuts. Rather I would suggest our first hope and aim is that people will be drawn to the living Person of Jesus, and, in being drawn to Him, will then be led into the whole wonderful world of meanings that follow.

It is attraction to the Person of Jesus which I believe is the best door for a person to begin the journey of seeking after God. There are other common approaches that motivate people to move toward Jesus: need for healing or help, fear of hell

or punishment, desire for forgiveness, hunger for meaning and purpose: all of these describe true realities, and are good and fine reasons, but the possible danger is that when these contexts are over-emphasized, Jesus can become a means to end, where the end is the true heart's desire and Jesus is simply the way to achieve that desired end. Ultimately, however, we want people to say yes to Jesus for His own sake (like the joy over the treasure in the field that caused the finder to go and sell everything in Matthew 13:44), and not merely as a means to some other end (which can make the end the superior object in the heart of the seeker). Think of the analogy of a person marrying Ethel for all sorts of reasons rather than simply for the love of Ethel.

Principle Four: *“He acted as if He were going farther”* (v. 28). We move by invitation not by pushing our way in. Here we see the *Person of Peace* Principle (which comes from Matthew 10:13) meaning we observe those who are inviting us into their lives and focus there. Remember Jesus and Zacchaeus: the little man was wanting badly to see Jesus, and Jesus gladly followed that trail. We need to always remember that Jesus is saving. It's not up to us to save the world. 2.4 billion Christians in the world out of 7.8 billion translates into 3 persons for each of us to help encounter Jesus, which suddenly doesn't feel so overwhelming. We are invited into God's saving work, and He is already at work everywhere we go, before we get there, and after we leave. The Trinitarian power and responsibility: The **Father** drawing people to Jesus (John 6:44), the **Holy Spirit** glorifying Jesus (John 16:14), and **Jesus'** historic act of salvation (John 12:32). We can be patient and not pushy.

Principle Five: *“Their eyes were opened and they recognized Him”* (v. 31) in the breaking of the bread. The place of seeing Jesus in this story was in the space between the broken pieces of bread--in the middle of the torn halves. The broken bread harkens back to the bread of the Last Supper (this is My body, given for you). Jesus' self-sacrifice out of obedience to the Father and love for the world was His quintessential “mark” (for that is why I came, Mark 10:45). Perhaps, then, it follows that whenever this same act of obedient self-sacrifice in the name of loving the other is embraced by Jesus' followers, the “tearing” of the Jesus-follower opens up a space in which there is a clear line of sight to the

resurrected Jesus Himself! Not in being nice. Not in being good. But laying down our life in some way for another.

Our “Story Tool Kit” to Help People Actually Encounter Jesus:

The story of Jesus in the Gospels

Jesus as the hero of my own story

Jesus seen in the sacrament of every story of our self- sacrificial love

May hearts “burn in themselves” as they see Jesus while we slip out of the way!