

A Powerful Communicator

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Date: 22 April 1992

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- [0 : 00] Will God include the prime minister? The passage that's been read to you today, which is the beginning, at least, of the story that is known as the walk to Emmaus.
- And this is Jesus, after his resurrection, walking somewhere out of Jerusalem and drawing near to two disciples and walking with them and talking as they go.
- And to my mind, it is quite the most beautiful of stories in the whole of the New Testament. It really is a very wonderful, beautiful story.
- And the trouble is, of course, that if you are sort of familiar with it, you mightn't look at it or notice it, in the same way that people who come to Vancouver find the beauty of the city quite breathtaking.
- You know, while the people who live in Vancouver mostly notice the garbage along the sidewalks, and that's all they see.
- [1 : 29] Well, we need to lift up our eyes and look at this story and see it. The lovely thing about it, when you think about it, is that there were two disciples walking on a road, and Jesus comes and walks with them, which means that nobody was looking at anybody else.
- They were talking to each other, but they weren't looking at each other. And that may be part of the reason that they didn't recognize him.
- And so as they talked, they had the whole panorama of the countryside around them, the spring, the fields, the mountains, the stones, all the things that were part of the countryside were the things that kept their eyes occupied.
- But the words were being shared by this powerful communicator. Again, I'm very unsatisfied with the title that I have to produce for the benefit of Lisa when she has to produce a card for the benefit of you.
- And I've got this brilliant title for it now. I have a new title. You can revise the title. It's on your card if you like. The new title is that this is a non-profit society.
- [3 : 08] And he's talking about it. Jesus is going along with these disciples.
- Walking down a country road, not looking at each other, but looking at the countryside that they're passing through. And Jesus begins, in the most loving and gracious way imaginable, to penetrate into their thinking and to get them to respond to a situation of which he is at the center.
- So, he inquires of them, what is this conversation you're holding? Because they were obviously in earnest conversation.
- And they, in surprise, say, are you the only person in Jerusalem that doesn't know the things that have come to pass in these days? And Jesus penetrates more deeply into their hearts and lives by saying to them, what things?
- And they then proceed to explain to him. And, because I like this story, and I hope that you like it too and get to like it more, we're going to join with them on this walk.

- [4 : 39] And, when David Richardson speaks, I don't know that he's going to join with us in the walk. He has his own title. But, Jan Porsino is coming, and we're going to be involved in this walk from now till the 3rd of June.
- So, I hope you'll get the story in your mind and understand it. And watch the graciousness with which Jesus approaches these people and get these two people that are with him and gets to the heart of their thinking.
- and in that way portrays to us the, I mean, how do you inform people that Jesus is risen from the dead?
- How do you convince people of that? I mean, the fact is, so far outside the realm of human awareness and human consciousness, how do you talk about it?
- How do you raise the subject? How do you get people to look at something which is so remote from their experience? It's a long way from the sort of pattern of our thinking and the pattern of these two disciples who simply observed what was going on, were sad, disappointed, discouraged, disillusioned, and depressed disciples and walking along and wondering, what it means and Jesus having to get near to them and to communicate to them.
- [6 : 21] You know, it's a in our society, I it's the problem that I have and the problem that this story speaks to me about is the problem of how you get from here to here, from a can of beer to the chalice at communion.
- You know, it's a long way. People are at home with this, understand it, are nurtured by it, find fellowship around it, get inspiration from it, of a certain kind at least, and it gives them an understanding which they otherwise don't have.
- And so does this. But somehow this is more congenial to most people than this. And how do you move from the thing that is congenial in your life to the thing that seems utterly foreign and way beyond your imagination and understanding?
- How do you do that in our society? And so you have this beautiful picture of Jesus moving in on these disciples and asking them these questions in order to bring them to the place where they can grasp for themselves the reality of what has taken place.
- And he has to begin where they are. When Jesus says to them what things have taken place, they say to him simply, well, it's about Jesus, a prophet, powerful in word and deed before all the people.
- [8 : 11] So that was as far as they could go. There's a word in there which you don't see in the English translation which says, Jesus, the man, the prophet, powerful in word and deed.
- But the word man isn't there because it seems unnecessary to the translation, I guess. But it implies that they understood him as no more than a man and no more than a prophet but a significant prophet because he was powerful in word and deed.
- And that's what prophets need to be. Powerful in word and deed. You know how religion is divided between the people who say it and don't do it and the people who do it and don't say it.
- And the church is split down the middle by this indecision about what you do. The prophet was the man who both said it and did it. You know that the word and the work came together and that's so that he was a prophet.
- And Jeremiah had told people long ago that if you want to check out a prophet, what you do is to see whether his word and his work fit together. And if they don't, then you must reckon him to be a false prophet.
- [9 : 35] So they understood Jesus to be a prophet. And a man. And they knew what prophets were because they had had prophets among them for centuries.

And much of their scripture was written by the prophets. And when I call this a non-prophet society, I mean by that that in our society we seem to have replaced prophets with politicians or polls or something like that that can tell us what the future holds for us.

But prophets were different. When Jesus asked the disciples, who do people say that I am, what is the popular understanding of Jesus, would be interesting to stand on the street corners and ask people that here in Vancouver today.

But when they asked them, they said, well, some say that you are Elijah. And remember, Elijah was the one who went to heaven in the fiery chariot and they thought he might come back the same way.

Some think that you're John the Baptist and others think you're one of the prophets. So the general popular understanding of Jesus at the end of his life, his teaching and his miracles was that he was a prophet.

[11 : 18] And that was the popular image that they had of him. You may remember that when he was being tried in the palace of Pilate, the governor, one of the soldiers showed his profound understanding of what it means to be a prophet by putting a blindfold on Jesus so that he couldn't see and then striking him across the face and saying, all right, now prophesy.

Who was it that hit you? And that's, you know, that was a kind of popular understanding of prophets, that they were people with blindfolds on who could tell what was happening.

And that doesn't give a very good picture, but it's one of the pictures of what in the popular imagination a prophet was.

But then there's probably the most poignant example of what a prophet is in the Old Testament story where you remember that David was out on his penthouse apartment, as it were, looking down over the city and he saw this beautiful woman, Bathsheba, having a bath and he sent for her and she came to him and he lay with her and a child was conceived.

And he was embarrassed by that and found out about her husband, tried to implicate her husband in the conception of the child, which the husband refused to do because he was a soldier on duty.

[13 : 07] And so David had him sent to the front line and had him put to death and took his wife to be, and took the soldier's wife to be his wife.

And then he went on with his life and his duties and responsibilities. And so what he had done, in effect, was to create, at the center of his life, a lie, I guess you'd call it.

I mean, it was not a spoken lie, it was a lie that he was living out, as though this woman had married him and they'd conceived a child and the child was theirs and that that was quite proper and he was, he was, I mean, lies can be seen through fairly easily sometimes and probably this one could be by most of the people, but David didn't see it as a lie and he maintained it, he maintained this fantasy around which he lived.

And, but he had a good friend who was a prophet, you know, and that friend was Nathan and Nathan went to him one day and said, King David, there was a rich farmer who had many sheep and there was a poor farmer, a peasant farmer with a small family and they had a pet lamb, a stranger came along, the rich farmer had to, by the laws of hospitality, provide hospitality for the stranger who came along.

So the rich farmer went to the peasant and said, I want your lamb and took the pet lamb from the fireside of the house and had it killed, dressed and served to the stranger.

[14 : 45] And as Nathan told the story, David's indignation rose and rose and rose. He was so angry at what had happened and he commanded that this man should be dealt with immediately.

And Nathan said, you're the man, you know, that this was how he fulfilled his prophetic function by breaking through the fantasy, breaking through the lie and being able to bring the truth to the attention of David.

And so that's basically what prophets do. They come among us and they are, by one way or another, able to point their finger at the lie and so that it's not surprising that we put them to death in order to preserve the integrity of the lie or the fantasy by which we live.

And so it wasn't an unusual thing that this man, Jesus, ended up on a cross because he was a prophet and he had shown by his teaching and by his miracles, he had shown the structure of his society, both the Romans and the Jewish people, that they were living a kind of fantasy.

I found it helpful to think about Scott Peck's book, *The People of the Lie*, when he talks about American society and how they were told what a glorious war they were fighting in Vietnam and that they preserved this at great cost in terms of spreading falsehood.

[16 : 52] They preserved the idea that this was a great crusade that a noble people were on on behalf of other people and that went on and on and on saying that this was a great thing and Scott Peck's book was to try and show that this was a kind of national conspiracy around a fantasy which had no basis in truth and it needed to be shot down.

And so that in that sense a prophet is someone who comes to the people of the lie and tells them what the truth is.

And that was how these disciples understood Jesus, that he was a prophet who came into his world and said what the truth was.

And of course we find it in our society much easier to live with certain fantasies and certain ideas and we preserve them because there's certain practical expedience involved in them.

I mean in the Old Testament again you have Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Elijah was the one and the whole sort of structure under the monarch and his wife Jezebel was a structure that was entirely false and dominated by the prophets of Baal and Elijah went in and said they're liars and I'll demonstrate it to you and you remember the powerful demonstration that he gave of the fact that they were lying.

[18 : 36] and so that was who they thought who they thought Jesus was that he was he was a prophet.

Sometimes prophets did good things that is they they didn't prophesy inevitable disaster sometimes they told a truth when the nation was in the midst of disaster so that you get a man like Jeremiah who when the Assyrians had besieged the city were surrounding it and about to close in and destroy it Jeremiah went and collected his money and went out and bought a piece of real estate within the occupied territory and when they were facing inevitable I mean it's I'm not sure whether this would be an apt illustration but it would if you had a billion dollars in your bank account and you took it today and invested it in Canary Wharf that that might be comparable to what Jonah did or what Jeremiah did that he went out in the midst of of what was going on and said there's a future there is a hope

God is in control and good things are going to happen and I'm prepared to invest in that well he was he was laughed out of court so to speak for what he had done for being a complete fool for telling a lie as they thought when in fact he was telling the truth and they were unable to accept it and that's basically what Jesus does for us is to tell the truth I got a poem here which I'll read to you I'm not keen on reading poems but it's not really a poem it's a song by Bruce Coburn which is called maybe the poet and it says maybe the poet is gay but he'll be heard anyway maybe the poet is drugged but he won't stay under the rug maybe the voice of the spirit and in which case you better hear it maybe he's a woman who can touch you where you're human male female alone or free peaceful or disorderly pay attention to the poet you need him and you know it maybe you and he will not agree but you need him to show you the way to see put him up against a wall shoot him up with pentothal shoot him up with lead so he won't call out what's been said you can put him in the ground but one day you'll look around and there'll be a face you don't know voicing thoughts you've heard before male female slave or free peaceful or disorderly pay attention to the poet you need him and you know it maybe you and he will not agree but you need him to show you the way to see which you know my son gave me that because he thought it was it was relevant to this that at the sort of at the bottom line the presence of

Jesus as the prophet powerful in word and deed comes to us to show us where the lie is and where the truth is in the circumstances of our lives the truth which which we there's a there's a modern way of describing which you know how they talk about people living in denial living in denial of the truth of their circumstances and somebody has to get through to them and break through that denial and help them to understand that's a very difficult thing to do and you must you must know that your relationship to lots of people is limited by the fact that they are living in denial and you cannot penetrate their denial and you know they don't want to talk about it they don't want to bring it up it's not a subject which is open for conversation you can't look at it you can't examine it you can't consider it you have made it your business to deny the truth and relevance of it and it's very difficult to do that now in a fellowship which is built around the person of Jesus

Christ one of the fundamental activities is that Jesus Christ as the prophet powerful in word and deed is to break through into the areas of your denial and my denial to help us see the truth of his purpose among us it's it's almost I think that probably there is in most of us a kind of still small prophet who talks to us sometime but we regard him as an idiot and won't listen to him and that part of having a relationship to Jesus Christ is that you will allow Christ to speak to that within you which is prepared to face the truth of your situation and to break through the denial so that something redemptive and constructive can happen and the way Jesus does it is a very gentle way

[24 : 52] I mean I think the story of Nathan the prophet is wonderful because Nathan was absolutely loyal to David he was absolutely a friend of David's he loved David he admired David he respected David he served David but because of that he told the truth to David and that's what that's how Christ fulfills for us the prophetic function of helping us to come to terms with the truth in our own lives I wouldn't trust you to do that for me I don't think you'd trust each other to do it for one another I don't know if there's anybody ultimately who can do it and for us I mean it's very difficult to do for one another highly skilled people find it difficult to do who are trained to do it one of the ways that it sometimes happens is that when you gather together in a small

Bible study group and you're reading together and you in that Bible study group are aware of the presence and teaching of Christ and the things that you're looking at in the passage that you're reading that in that situation Jesus fulfills his prophetic mission towards you and is able to put the finger on the area of your denial is able to put the finger on the lie within which we live the fantasy that we maintain in order to bring us through to some kind of reality in our relationship to him now this passage goes on to talk a lot more about Jesus than this but you see even at the most primary level they recognized universally that Jesus was a prophet powerful in word and in deed and like all prophets he died that's what

Jerusalem was famous for was killing the prophets that came among them as we still do we have to dispose of them because we can't we can't afford to have them around and so we we dispose of them from our own lives too and yet it's it's it's important isn't it that here Christ was working walking and working with these two men as they walked along the road and helping them to come to terms with something which was so far beyond them beyond any understanding they could possibly have had to help them come to terms with the reality which they were not yet to face and in a sense he was doing a Jeremiah for them telling them that there was something infinitely worthwhile investing in even in the midst of the present sorrow which they were experiencing and that's what Christ does for us in our present circumstances is to point to something which is infinitely worth investing in because it has to do with the truth of God which is inseparable from the love of God which is shown to us in

Jesus Christ let me say a prayer Lord Jesus help us to accept you as the prophet powerful in word and deed until I allow you to penetrate the circumstances of our lives that we are a people of certain lies and conventions which we maintain and which need to be blown apart I guess to and just that we may be free to allow you to do this to fulfill this ministry in our lives maybe to fulfill it through friends whom you love and whom we can trust trust but in order that we don't live in denial but that we live in relationship to the truth and that truth which in which the love of God is revealed and the grace of

God is made available we ask this in Christ's name Amen Amen Amen