

## When it all becomes clear

**Luke 24:13-35**

**April 26, 2015**

A week ago, at pretty much exactly this time, David and I sat down to eat in a little restaurant in Prague, a place famed for its delicious traditional Czech menu. I know it doesn't sound particularly surprising that in the capital of the Czech Republic we were eating Czech food, but if you know David, you know that he has only two food groups: pizza and pasta, and generally we seek out places offering those food groups. The earlier part of our trip, which was in Italy, had worked well, obviously, but now we were in the land of pork, cabbage and dumplings, so David was out of his comfort zone, and peering at the menu with a fair amount of anxiety.

But an hour later, they had won him over.

The food was amazing, the wine not bad at all, and in fact David was so happy that he told me he wanted to go into the kitchen and thank the chef in person.

Not only that, he wanted to tell him in Czech.

Well, I don't go anywhere without handy-dandy phrasebooks for just this purpose.

So I pulled out my Czech phrasebook (voila!) and we flipped through the pages until we found:

*That was delicious: to bi-lo luh hod nair*

We sat at the table practicing for a bit, and then David headed off to the kitchen.

*to bi-lo luh hod nair!*

he declared.

Well, the chef scratched his head in bemusement. The staff gathered around, puzzled. declared David again, a little less confidently.

The staff looked at each other. Was this man upset about something? Had he had one too many Czech beers?

I frantically flipped through the phrasebook, found the phrase we thought David was saying, and showed it to the chef.

And he grinned that grin you grin when ah, it all makes sense,  
and you get it, and it's good.

Oh -- toobeelo le hodnay, he said and he laughed with delight, and we laughed with  
embarrassment,  
and it was good.

It is always kinda magical when two people who don't speak the same language  
achieve that *aha* moment --

that moment when you get it. "Oh, *that's* what you meant!"

Sometimes it's a phrasebook that saves you, sometimes it's just wild pantomiming --  
I needed, for instance, to purchase Ben-Gay in an Italian pharmacy -- we had kinda  
overdone the walking -- and so I dramatically grabbed my knees and hobbled around  
moaning,

until finally, finally that moment when the pharmacist said "oh!" and grabbed a tube of -  
- well, we're not sure what it was, but it worked.

Those are good moments, those moments when someone understands you.

And when *you're* the one who gets it, that feels great too.

The toughest phrase I had to unravel in Budapest was said to me not in Hungarian, but  
in English -- of a sort.

A woman who was earnestly trying to demonstrate her proficiency and her friendliness  
said to me

"How dye ee, yuh all!"

It was *Howdy, y'all*, and I finally got it. That was a good moment.

(I didn't bother trying to explain the whole Connecticut - Texas difference)

I'm ruminating on all this because the story that [Brianna/Jono] and I read together is a  
story about understanding,

about finally comprehending,

about finding that moment of understanding that makes all the difference.

It is a long story, and I thank you for listening all the way through --

it's actually one of the longest stories about a single event in any of the Gospels.

Truth is, the guy who wrote these stories down years later *could* have shortened it up,  
but he didn't 'cause he knew the whole long story was important.

It's the story of two followers of Jesus who finally get it, who finally understand, and what they finally understand in their moment of comprehension is so important for all of *us* to understand that the Gospel writer wanted us to listen, really listen, to the *whole* thing.

We all know the Easter morning story. We all know that that morning, the women who loved Jesus went to his tomb to anoint his body, and it wasn't there. We all know the tomb was empty. That's the Easter *morning* story.

This is the Easter *afternoon* story, the one we don't hear as much, but one that I love. And it tells us that that first Easter was way more confusing and scary than we realize. We celebrate Easter with trumpets and Alleluias, but in this story, there are two hurting and hopeless people who don't know what to think, and who definitely haven't heard the trumpets yet.

It's Easter afternoon, and Cleopas and his friend, whose name we're never told, have just given up. On everything. The person that they adored and followed, Jesus, had died before their eyes three days before. And yes, they've heard something about an empty tomb, but that's just weird and confusing and slightly terrifying. They're grieving and heartbroken, and more than that, their hope has been destroyed -- because they thought, they really thought, that Jesus was the Messiah. And it's clear that they had it wrong.

So they decide to get out of town, Cleopas and friend. They decide to go to the town of Emmaus, and we don't really know why -- maybe one of them has parents there, maybe the food's good there, maybe it's just where you go when you need to go somewhere to get away from the hurt.

And while they're walking the seven mile walk,  
someone turns up next to them, out of the blue.  
And this someone says "what's up? why are you so sad?"  
And they tell him. They tell him that Jesus of Nazareth was killed;  
they tell him that they're brokenhearted,  
they tell him that their hope is gone.  
"We had hoped," says Cleopas, "that he would be the one to save us.  
We had hoped he was the Messiah."  
And this mystery person says "don't you understand?  
don't you get it? "  
And the story says that he walked and talked with them the whole rest of the way,  
told them stories from scripture,  
told them to be God's Messiah meant that you would suffer for the ones you love.  
He talked a different language than they were talking:  
he talked hope. He talked not of endings but beginnings.

And when their walk was over,  
he sat down to break bread with them --  
and that's when they saw it.  
That's when they saw that the man who'd walked with them the whole darn way was  
Jesus.  
Empty tomb Jesus himself.

I love this story.  
I love it because when these two guys -- or a man and a woman, we don't actually  
know --  
when these two people are hurting and hopeless and in that dark dark place from  
which there seems no escape,  
Jesus turns up to be with them.  
And what matters most to him is that they understand.  
That they understand that God has not left them.  
That they understand that the cross was not the end.  
That they understand that that incomprehensible empty tomb  
means that love is stronger than anything,  
and that they are loved beyond anything they knew.

And Jesus doesn't leave them until that moment of understanding arrives, that 'aha' moment.

*They* were speaking the language of hopelessness and endings; Jesus comes to them speaking the language of love -- and he won't leave them until they *get* what he's saying.

Which means the same is true for us.

Jesus won't leave us alone until we understand.

He won't leave us alone until we *get* just how much we are loved.

Someone who found that out for herself, that 'got it' moment on the Emmaus road, was the amazing Maya Angelou, whom we lost not quite a year ago.

Poet, writer, and woman of powerful faith,

Maya Angelou would often talk about the moment when she finally understood what God was saying to her,

the moment when she understood the language of God's love.

As the survivor of a childhood of great hurt and deprivation, she had gotten to the point, she said, where

*"It wasn't that I had stopped believing in God,*

*it's just that God didn't seem to be around the neighborhoods I frequented."*

And then, one day, when she was in her twenties,

her voice teacher, at the end of one of her singing lessons, gave her a book of devotions.

Didn't just give it to her -- he opened it, and asked her to read a section out loud.

This is how she would tell the story:

"He asked that I read a section that ended with these words:

God loves me.

So I read the piece and closed the book, and the teacher said,

"read it again."

I pointedly opened the book, and I sarcastically read,

"God loves me."

He said, "Again". And then again and again and again, it must have been 7 times or more.

And the last time I finally said "God. Loves. Me."

And I began to cry.

I knew finally not only that there was a God but that I was a child of God.

And when I *understood* that, when I *comprehended* that, when I internalized that and ingested that, I became courageous.

Because if God loved me, the God who made everything from leaves to seals to oak trees,

then what was it that I couldn't do?"

It was Maya Angelou's moment of understanding --

when this young woman who had known only the language of hurt and abandonment finally heard and *comprehended* God's language of love.

Just like as he did with those lost and hurting travelers on the road to Emmaus,

Jesus wouldn't leave her alone until she heard what he was saying:

that she was loved, truly loved, and not alone.

A child of God.

God does the same for us.

Because the truth is that we *all* find ourselves on the road to Emmaus at some point in our lives.

Which is to say, we all find ourselves in a place where things have fallen apart or at least aren't very good,

and what we thought would be isn't,

what we thought would help hasn't.

And like Cleopas and company, we start speaking the language of lost hope.

"We had thought he was the one to save us," Cleopas said, "but I guess we were wrong."

That's a language that *all* of us find ourselves speaking at some point,

I had thought ... I was wrong ... I am alone.

And in that place, in that hard place on the Emmaus road, a companion appears who is speaking a *different* language.

A language of love, a language that he wants more than anything for us to understand.

And he'll keep talking to us until we hear it,  
he'll stay with us until we see who he is,  
he'll stick with it until that moment when we *get it*.  
When we know that love is real,  
and there *is* no alone.

There *is* a phrasebook that'll help you with that conversation,  
and it's the book that [Brianna/Jono] and I just read to you from.  
It'll help you learn the language of God's love.  
But most of all, you just need to listen and listen hard.  
And to notice the one who's walking right beside you,  
and always will be.

Amen.