

“Rebirth: Ongoing Conversion”  
“What Is Being Revealed?”

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalm 34:1-10

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

Two of the disciples were walking to Emmaus, a seven-mile journey from Jerusalem. It was at some point during that forty-day period following the resurrection but before the ascension. On the journey, a stranger came alongside two of the disciples in their journey. What occurred in their conversation was startling. The stranger, who was Jesus, enabled the two disciples “...to put together the disparate experiences of life into a meaningful, coherent whole, to see a pattern and purpose in human history.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus demonstrated that faith in him gathers together all the experiences that do not make sense in life, begins to bring sense to one’s experiences, and provides an overarching plan that history does make sense since God is at work in it. Do any of you desire the disparate experiences in your life to be put together into a meaningful whole so that you can see a pattern and purpose to it all? As Jesus revealed himself to the two disciples, Jesus is revealing himself to each one of us today in order for us as well, to have the disparate experiences in our lives put together into a meaningful whole so that we too can see a pattern and purpose to it all.

Jesus’ death on the cross exposes the radical nature of God’s love for people whose lives are filled with disparate experiences. Listen to this insight from Christian Smith’s book *Soul Searching* on knowing the God of the Bible as opposed to the god of our imaginations:

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<sup>1</sup>John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 30.

In his book *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith summarized perceptions about God that are prevalent in the church and in contemporary culture. He said that most young evangelicals [people] believed in what could best be described as “moral, therapeutic deism” (we could also call this viewpoint “the Santa Claus god”). *Moral* implies that God wants us to be nice. He rewards the good and withholds from the naughty. *Therapeutic* means that God just wants us to be happy. *Deism* means that God is distant and not involved in our daily lives. God may get involved occasionally, but on the whole, God functions like an idea not a personal being actively present in our world. According to Smith, this is the version of God that’s prevalent in our culture and in our churches. Often without realizing it, every culture quietly molds and shapes our views of God. But we can’t grow in our relationship with God when we insist on relating to God as we think he should be. It’s the same way in our human relationships: if I demand that you just meet my needs and conform to my assumptions about you, you will probably feel cheapened and manipulated. That’s why our surrender to God-as-he-is, as revealed in the Bible, is so important. Otherwise, we will have a god of our own imaginations—and, embarrassingly, our American god is an obese, jolly toymaker who works one day a year.<sup>2</sup>

It's not just young people who believe in an imaginary god and not the God of the Scriptures.

This trend to believe in an imaginary god permeates all generations. The God of the Scriptures demonstrate God the Father loving and the God the Son (Jesus) redeeming life’s disparate experiences into a meaningful whole.

Isaiah 51:1-6, Psalm 34:1-10, 1 Peter 1:17-23, and Luke 24:13-35 ask us to see and understand what God is revealing to assist us in bringing the disparate experiences of our lives together into a meaningful whole, by living in the hope of resurrection.

The story of the road to Emmaus engages us in two ways. First, **Jesus opens the mind to understand the Scriptures.** On the road to Emmaus, the two disciples lived in the crucible of familiarity and mystery. The stranger, Jesus, opened their minds to the reality of love winning and death losing. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, not only the two disciples but every human has the offer to believe in Jesus and have the story of salvation capture them. And that, my friends, is the profound message of the Scriptures. Luke 24:27 reads, “...beginning with

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<sup>2</sup>This illustration is found on preachingtoday.com. It is adapted from Christian Smith, *Soul*

Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them all things about himself in all the scriptures.” Jesus opened their minds and opens our minds to understand the redemptive narrative of the Scriptures. Why? So that disparate life experiences can be brought together in a meaningful whole.

Second, **the resurrected Jesus helps you address life’s disparate experiences; personal, global, cultural, and societal.** When the disciples saw the risen Jesus, there was both recognition and confusion. Believing and knowing are two different things. Knowing is belief that is actively engaged in life through attitudinal, ethical, and behavioral change. Belief makes no difference until one uses it in real life situations. On the road to Emmaus, the two disciples knew the story of Jesus’s death and resurrection. They knew the story of God’s love calling a people to know, love, and follow Jesus. But it was their beliefs not being put into action that caused their knowledge to be ineffective for the real life needs they experienced. Real life needs are often concealed in disparate life experiences that have yet to be brought together into a meaningful whole.

And so, we are to live by faith. In other words, **what difference does the risen savior make when death, not love, appears to be winning?** When death appears to be winning an examination of disparate life experiences is warranted. And as the risen savior brings together disparate experiences into a meaningful whole, hope replaces despair. Jesus reassured the two disciples that hope was real and his love for them profound. Hear the words of the two disciples after supping with Jesus in Luke 24:32, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Yes, we are to live by faith. **When the resurrected Jesus reveals himself to you and wants to walk with you as you embrace your life's disparate experiences, Jesus and you will bring those disparate experiences together into a meaningful whole.** And this is a good thing. Grapple with being stopped in your tracks. When the stranger asked the two disciples what they were doing, they stopped in their tracks. The stranger invited them from isolation into community, from thoughts of despair into hope. Jesus brought their disparate life experiences together into a meaningful whole. And then when they supped with Jesus, they were enlivened with trust and hope as the meaningful whole came together. Remember, "Give as much of yourself as you can to as much of Jesus Christ as you understand."<sup>3</sup> The disparate parts of one's life are brought together into a meaningful whole.<sup>4</sup>

Love wins. Death loses. If you have been illuminated by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, then offer witness to how Jesus meets you exactly where you are with some disparate experiences brought together into a meaningful whole, but others still outside the meaningful whole. Stop, listen, act and say, "Thank you God for loving me. I trust that you'll continue to bring disparate experiences of my life together into a meaningful whole. Stop. Listen. Act. God is revealing the plan and purpose for your life. Amen!"

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)  
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<sup>3</sup>Jim Tozer former pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in West Lafayette, Indiana.

<sup>4</sup>In the five paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Ian A. McFarland, Karoline M. Lewis, Rhodora E. Beaton, Cynthia L. Rigby, Beverly Zink-Sawyer, Margaret P. Aymer, and Ruben Rosario Rodriguez as found in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 225-227, 227-229, 230-231, 232-234, 234-235, 236-238, and 238-240.