

LUKE 24:13-27

That very same day, two of Jesus' followers were on their way to a village called Emmaus, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now Jesus himself came up and walked by their side, but something prevented them from recognizing him. He said to them, "What matters are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped short, their faces downcast.

Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, "You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days." "What things?" he asked. "All about Jesus of Nazareth," they answered, "who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all. Two whole days have gone by since it all happened and some women from our group have astounded us. They went to the tomb in the early morning and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing."

Then he said to them, "You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?" Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

NOW WHAT?

Luke 24:13-27

When was your last *Now What?* moment? Is it possible it was in the last two months? We have them throughout our life cycles and they offer some of the most profound spiritual opportunities that naturally present themselves. But they do not always feel that way because they are preceded by an abrupt change of events. We know they are out there waiting for us, but we cannot anticipate each one. And they can challenge our faith.

In leading up to the Easter event, we appropriately focused our attention on Jesus. Post Easter, however, we switch to the disciples. Talk about a *Now What?* experience! No one had expected that it would end as it did. *Our hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free.*

What a turn of events! As we saw on Palm Sunday, the Triumphal Entry was perceived to be the spark that would ignite some event that would effectively end Rome's rule and its oppression of the Hebrew nation. Exactly how Jesus' followers imagined that would occur is anybody's guess. But the experiences of the past three years with this incredible man who *proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and the whole people* convinced them that he could pull off this miraculous event even if they did not understand exactly how it would unfold.

What had rattled them to their foundations was the move by the chief priests and rulers to hand him over to the Romans for crucifixion as an insurrectionist. And now they were left scratching their heads, having no idea what lay ahead for any of them. They were in a state of shock and disillusionment, clinging to their fellowship as we all do when we seek comfort for an unexpected disaster. It was a punch in the gut and *their faces were downcast.*

So *Now What?* Did they return to their fishing businesses and reunite with their families? It is likely they all had wives and children. Jewish males usually married by 16 and

did not wait to produce offspring. To imagine these guys were all celibate monks is absurd. But, on the other hand, to think of disbanding after all they had been through together was not an attractive proposition. There were just lots and lots of questions that defied easy solutions, questions they could not even wrap their minds around. *Now What?* indeed!

How are we facing our current *Now What* question? It will be resolved over a period of unknown time. There will be a process involved as the permanent changes in our lives become more clear. *Now What?* moments can be real life changers and throw us into shock, disillusionment and confusion.

If we had a GPS life plan disaster alert plan on our I Phones, we could avoid a lot of *Now Whats?* We can plan for retirement. We can carry adequate health insurance and guarantee that we won't fall into some donut hole. If we pay attention to life and keep our heads out of the sand, we can foresee certain things coming and plan for eventualities. A long-term insurance plan could be the best purchase you ever make. But obviously, life is not predictable and all bases can never be covered. The unexpected lurks around every corner. According to epidemiologists, we should have seen this one coming and had plans in place. But our collective denial drowned out the warning. And now here we are, fighting a forest fire with a garden hose.

We did not cause the fire, but a lot things that happen to us are out of our control. No matter. What becomes our responsibility is how we choose to work with them. Because nobody else can do that for us. Praying for God to step in and fix things is not going to work.

I recently viewed a Canadian film on Netflix entitled, "Still Mine" which is based upon a true story featuring an elderly, mid 80s, extremely fit farmer by the name of Craig Morrison who faced one *Now What?* moment following another. In a nutshell, his wife had begun to suffer from dementia and their old farm house was freezing cold during the protracted Ontario winters. Given their age, they could no longer cope with frozen pipes and icy floors and their children were pressuring them to move into town to a retirement village.

A move away from his land, however, was not on Morrison's bucket list. So *Now What?* With the onset of spring, against the counsel of his children and friends, the old farmer decided he would build with his own hands a new, smaller home on another piece of his property which had a lake view. He had the skills to do it and his son reluctantly agreed to help with the heavier tasks.

Shortly after they had poured the footers and he began framing it, Morrison's persistently nosy neighbor warned him that he was violating the law because he did not have a building permit. Why would he need a permit to build on his own land? But bowing to his son's advice, he went into town to apply for one—and that's where the trouble began. He could not provide a blueprint. Why would he need a blueprint? The plan was in his head. He knew what he was doing.

Another *Now What?* And they just kept on coming as he faced continuous inspection failures for minuscule code violations which were accompanied by the accelerating deterioration of his wife's health, the latest crisis a broken hip she sustained in a fall she could not even remember taking. In spite of his efforts to satisfy the building commission by going back and redoing his work and through his attorney attempting to negotiate a reasonable solution to the growing mess, the commissioner refused to budge and told him he could either cease and desist or they would bulldoze his house and throw him in jail. He felt like one of the Three Pigs. *Now What?* His stubborn Canadian farmer side kicked in. He said, "Screw it!, finished the house and landed in court. In the meantime, the local newspaper picked up on the story and the authorities were more than a little incensed. The hearing did not go well. Prior to his sentencing, Morrison asked if he could speak. Granted permission, he pleaded his case, deftly turning the tables on the judge, presenting him with a *Now What?* moment. For he relates to him that his wife will be returning home from her hip rehabilitation the next day and that he is either going to take her to live in their newly finished home or that he will go to jail. "*Now What?*, your Honor? What is *your* decision? Tell the press and all these people in the

courtroom what you want to do.”

As Jesus' followers were on the road to Emmaus, they considered their options as the risen Jesus came up and walked with them. And as they discussed their dilemma, still unaware that the stranger who had joined their conversation was Jesus, they related to him the rumors that had come to their ears from the women who had visited the tomb and not found a body. They did not know what to do with that information.

Jesus responded, “You foolish men. So slow to believe the full message of the prophets!” And he goes on to explain why the suffering and the crucifixion was necessary. In other words, he put it into a wider context for them. God has a larger plan than you are seeing.

The message beneath the message was, “Don't give up. Keep going! You have work to do. God is faithful. Continue to dream. Yes, there are turns in the road. Yes, our blueprints have to be altered from time to time. People will get sick. People will die. Mistakes will be made. The *Now Whats?* can fly at us from all directions. But with each one an answer will come too. It may not be the answer you seek. But it will be the answer you need.

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