
Sermon

A sermon by the Rev. Ricardo Bailey

“Thank ya Laude! Its Back to School Sunday!”

“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” (Luke 24)

This is now the time and the season for graduation. However, before we actually don our caps and gowns, receive our diplomas or degrees and of course, get “turned up” at our post-graduation parties and say like Soulja Boy Tell Em – “WE MADE IT!” We must screech our tires, pump our breaks and remember that we must take our exams. Yes, final exams are that necessary evil that we all must go through to show and prove exactly what we know and re-transmit what we have learned.

However, I don’t care who you are: school can get boring. Church, I am a teacher and I even bore myself. I get tired! I know what these young folks are going through. At times you get to the point after all of the work when you say, I am just thankful that they called my name and gave me my piece of paper. I don’t wanna graduate *Summa Cum Laude*, I don’t wanna graduate *Magna Cum Laude*, I don’t even graduate *Cum Laude*: Oh Lord, I want to be in that number where I can graduate: *THANK YA LAUDE!*

Let the Church say, Amen!

I can only imagine how the two disciples on that road to Emmaus felt, especially after they got checked by Jesus who was walking with them on the road! Now, I can sympathize with these two disciples because the Gospel tradition is consistent in its explanation of the stories of the Resurrection of Jesus: the disciples, the women, the Apostles – none of them recognized Jesus off the rip in His Resurrected form. So, it seems that they should get a break, right?

With all of our 2000-plus year old wisdom under our belts, WE KNOW what our response would be. Or do we? The main variable that these two disciples did not get an A on is that they were ready to give it all up. They had already made their way away from Jerusalem. They expressed to the Jesus that they did not recognize on the road why they were disappointed: If the Gospel was too long for you, let me give you the “actual factuals” of what they said:

“... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

It was in this statement that these two disciples made a D+ – barely passing – in the “*Jesus Is the Son of God Course 101.*” This was not even an AP Exam! All the Disciples heard and had seen was just like a teacher going over a lesson time and

time again so that the main idea of the topic can be revealed to the students. These Disciples did not fail the course, because like Jesus did, a good teacher will recognize the weak points of the test assessment that the student did not do well on and then the teacher will go over the lesson again so that the student will now know the material, own the material and when the time comes, the student will be able to SHARE THE MATERIAL!

Jesus did this by truly taking these Disciples “back to school!” You never get too old, too accomplished or too important to learn essential lessons over again! Jesus explained to them in the midst of their intended decision to give up that God was and is faithful. He told them that the death that He underwent and all of the things He had done before the Calvary event were necessary because they all fulfilled the Scriptures. Just like the fictional leader of the “A-Team,” Col. John Hannibal Smith’s signature line in every show and in the motion picture would always say, “I LOVE IT WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER!” On the road to Emmaus, Jesus showed them that the plan actually came together!

Just like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, you and I can fit ourselves right inside their sandals on that Easter evening. We all have had our hearts broken and even had unrequested remixes done to our lives. Everything has not gone our way, but because things have not happened the way we want, does that mean that God is not active or relevant? We come to Church every Sunday (some of us even throughout the week) and there are times when we can feel that God is not there for me or that God is not making Himself present to me so that I can get through this situation!

My friends, God is not an ATM machine. You can’t put the card in, get an option of what will work for you and walk away happily ever after. No, God is a God who BELIEVES in your ability to be strong and to use all of the senses you have been equipped with so that you can put your faith into action and realize that you are a Christian for the tragedies in life, you are a Christian for the misunderstandings in life, you are a Christian when the people who are closest to you talk behind your back and bless you in your face – Lord, have mercy! You are a CHRISTIAN when everything has been taken from you, when you have been insulted, betrayed, left for dead, but somewhere ON THE INSIDE, you remembered that –

“On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross.
The symbol of suffering and shame.
But, I love that old cross, where the dearest and best,
for a world of loss sinners was slain!
So, I’ll cherish the Old Rugged Cross!
Till my trophies, at last I’ll lay down.
I will cling to the Old Rugged Cross,
and exchange it someday for a Crown!”

That is what they sang on Good Friday, but on Easter Sunday they sang:

“I don’t feel no ways tired,
I come too far from where I started from;
Nobody told me that the road would be easy;
I don’t believe He brought me this far to leave me.”

Jesus took His two disciples to what we call at Westminster – Back Work – and He explained to them who He was and what the Plan of Salvation was all about. Then, typical to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus met them at a table, over a meal and – What did the Gospel say this morning?

“[H]e had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

The two Disciples realized that it was Jesus when He explained to them about the Word of God. The two Disciples realized that it was Jesus when He broke the bread and shared it with them! I don’t know about your Church, but this is a THANK YA’ LAUDE moment!

Right now in this part of our celebration, God’s Word has been proclaimed and has been made available for you to take and share. In a few moments, Canon Knowlton will lead us all in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper – the Eucharist – the

Sacrament where we come as we are, with all of our issues and we hear the Priests say to us: “THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE BREAD OF LIFE!” We don’t come to Church to worship a bi-polar, “I’m gonna strike you down” kind of God! We come together as the Church to celebrate the mercy, compassion and liberation that we receive from a God who is radically in love with us!

I know that as a Christian, as a Husband, as a Father and yes, even as a Priest: I have failed a whole lot. There are times that Father Ricardo Bailey just doesn’t get it.

NEWSFLASH: I’m not perfect! There are times where I feel alone, misunderstood, under-appreciated, player-hated against and even talked about negatively. But it is at those moments that I realize that is why I am a Christian, because this is part of the plan. Not a plan to break me down, but a plan to build me up, so that I can be a testimony of how God can use, a testimony of how God is using me, and a testimony that if God can use me, just imagine what God can do for you!

The lesson here is to remember that we cannot give up on God’s plans. It takes faith and a faith that the world does not understand or even appreciate to be a Christian! It takes faith to know that God is speaking a Word of freedom and new life for all of you! It takes faith to believe that the bread that we receive today is a true dress rehearsal of the way that we are called to be for one another in the world! Church, can you say that people recognize Jesus in your words and even in the things that you do?

The Easter Gospel account of the Emmaus experience is a call for the Church to make Jesus real for the entire world! It is a reality-check from Jesus to make certain that we get the Heavenly-tutorials that we need so that we can be stronger, wiser and like Marvin Sapp would end it; “so much better!” This is real for me. This is not a job. This is a way of life so that what I experience and receive from Jesus, I can have the courage to share it with the world!

Will you join the class? Will you have the humility to admit your misunderstandings, your weaknesses and even your failings and allow Jesus to meet you on your road – not to Emmaus – but on Peachtree Street, W. Wesley, Lenox Road, Piedmont Road, Ponce de Leon Avenue, Auburn Avenue, Ashby Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. Will you let Jesus in on your way?

We are a people of God’s Word and we are a Church of Christ’s Sacraments! Therefore Church, here is your extra credit for your final exam today: “Imitami Quod Tractatis” – “IMITATE WHAT YOU HOLD!” This is the gift and the mystery we receive in Jesus. This is the A that we are given! Its free. Its called GRACE and yes, it is AMAZING!

Remember that in Jesus’ Name: you are worthy, you are loved and thanks be to God: you are passing the test!

THANK YA’ LAUDE!

And the Cathedral Church said, AMEN!