

He Plays Dumb, and Calls Us Foolish [Scott Kinder-Pyle]

Psalm 34:1—10

Luke 24:13—35

This is going to sound strange, and it is strange because it's coming from a stranger: *THE RESURRECTED JESUS HAS A LIFE. GOD, IN CHRIST, HAS A LIFE*—and I'm inferring this from a brief moment in Luke 24:28, when ***“he walked ahead as if he were going on...”*** Jesus appeared as if he were going on; and maybe he didn't just appear that way as some kind of ploy; maybe he has better things to do. Consider the following verses as background:

- In Exodus 33: Moses prays to God, ***“Show me your glory...”*** God tells Moses, ***“I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; and then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back.”***
- Psalm 139:17—18: ***“How weighty to me are. your thoughts, God? How vast is the sum of them...”***
- Job 38:4: ***“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”***
- Isaiah 55:8—9: ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are my ways, your ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”***

Hmmm. Who knew? Apparently God has a LIFE! Or—to put this another way—if we're under the impression that God is only *God* when God is only interested in our immediate needs and only responsive to our immediate concerns, that's probably not God. And likewise, Jesus is not *Jesus* when he only appears on *TikTok*, or *Instagram*, or *Facebook*, or *Truth Social*. Jesus has a life—*THE Resurrection and the Life*—irrespective of the ways we try to associate ourselves with him.

Let's review: two *less-than-prominent* disciples are walking the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They barely have time to breathe before a stranger approaches them and overhears what they're saying. Cleopas and his companion "**had hoped**" that Jesus of Nazareth would be the one "**to redeem Israel**"; and in that sense they've already fit his story into the story they've told themselves. Unfortunately, he was accused of sedition and blasphemy and put to death on a cross. The Resurrection is something they've heard about—but at this point, it seems highly improbable (to say the least). And so, check this out: this stranger, who apparently doesn't have a clue, *is* none other than the Risen Christ. Cleopas and his traveling partner, however, are so preoccupied with their own story about Jesus that they can't see the *life* who has come alongside them. Jesus has a life that doesn't correspond with their own wants, needs, fears and hopes. Jesus has a life apart from all that. And yet here he is, playing dumb... coming close.

My grandmother used to give me a crisp \$20 bill every Christmas. To me, during my childhood years, that was who she was. She was the old lady who showed up at family gatherings with a card, and within the card was my pizza money. I also observed how she had a wheezy sort of laugh and with a cigarette dangling from her lips, she'd frequently roll her eyes as if to say, 'Let's not take all this so seriously.' And yet, it wasn't until my late teens when I learned the story of how her husband, my grandfather, had died. He died as a result of a fire at the family-owned service station. And that's pretty much all I knew... Oh well. Ancient history. Not anything concerning me.

Then, for my senior year, a sociology teacher assigned a family-tree project through which I would have to interview all my living relatives and rummage through all of their life mementos. The old lady who gave me \$20 for Christmas was one of them. And I'll never forget the look on her wrinkled face when I asked to come over and to explore the things that she had been stored away. She played dumb saying, "What things?" But she knew: in boxes beneath cobwebs, in closets and cupboards, she had scribblings on envelopes and portraits of frowning black and white faces...and then I came upon a little leather-bound journal of parchment paper with poems and pencil etchings: *'Roses are red; violets are blue...'* And then I saw it—an intimate signature from the man she married in 1925—*'Yours Always, Charlie'*—and the words, I don't mind telling you, were thick with romantic and sensual innuendo. I looked up from reading them, feeling very foolish: *my grandmother had a life*. She had her own desires, hopes, fears and griefs—none of them had anything to do with me or my pizza money.

Now I want to be really clear so there's no misunderstanding: for me to say that Jesus has a life—and is the Resurrection and the Life—isn't to say that he's indifferent and doesn't care. *'Jesus loves me this I know; for the Bible tells me so...'* but have you read the Bible? Jesus has; and ***"beginning with Moses and all the prophets,"*** he interprets the Hebrew scriptures as if he's moving on down the road. This is more than pizza money; and every time we're inclined to think we've got Jesus figured out, he vanishes out of sight. We're not fitting him into our story; he's fitting us into his story.

National Public Radio broadcasts a storytelling podcast called the *Moth Radio Hour*, and during one episode I listened to something that happened to a woman with a history degree. This woman was in-the-know about a lot of things, and during a walking tour of the Alhambra Palace in Grenada, Spain, she and her sister decided to lay low. That is, with her extensive knowledge of Moorish and Medieval history, she decided to separate herself from the typically-obnoxious American tourist-crowd and lag behind—so if they needed to, they could slip away and finish the tour sooner. At least, that was the plan. Unfortunately, they found themselves getting stuck repeatedly behind a peculiar man who wore these gigantic glasses, and who clung to the arm of the woman next to him and who before every painting or sculpture or embroidery would shout, “Oooh, Wow!”—followed by an “Ahh!” which was even louder.

At first, the expert in Moorish and Medieval history described how they chuckled... No big deal. But after a while it became really annoying to have to wait for the man to finish *Ooohing* and *Ahhhing*. And as they found themselves getting really perturbed during one of those stand-stills, someone else on the tour made this obvious and probably sarcastic comment: “He’s really enjoying this, isn’t he?” There was a pause. And the man with the gigantic glasses clung to a woman next to him more tightly. And this was her explanation: “Yeah, he just had corrective eye surgery and every color, every shape, everything is brand new to him.”

Everything is brand new! Everything is brand new! Everything is brand new!

And don’t we feel foolish?

“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Jesus has a life—a *Resurrection Life*—that he’s willing and able and delighted to share.

But to receive what he’s offering means letting go of faith as a mere tourist activity. Are

we on a tour? Are we here just to sing the songs that are singable? What about the hard

work of forgiveness—receiving it and giving it? What about the possibility of

redemptive suffering? What about identifying with those who are strangers, immigrants,

the mentally-ill...? What about truth-telling in the face of monstrous lies? What about

speaking up when it’s easier to stay silent? What about staying silent when it’s easier to

gossip or spread rumors? What about going out of our supposed way to be there for

people who we don’t really know, or who don’t know us? Jesus has a LIFE that involves

all those things. And yes, a church like Northwood Presbyterian Church can become the

whole journey, from Jerusalem to Emmaus. A congregation with strange relationships

like we have can be that seven-mile trek during which we feel a little sad, a little foolish

and then maybe, just maybe, like Cleopas and his friend, we’ll ask the amazing question:

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?”