

Turn Away From Your Wandering **John 20:26-28; 21:15-17**

I spent some time this week looking back at the stories in each of the gospels about Christ's resurrection and one of the things that stuck out to me were the appearances Jesus made to people after he rose from the dead. He didn't walk around publicly like he had done before, but he appeared to specific people on specific occasions, and only to his disciples and followers. The Gospels record that he made 10 appearances during the 40 days after his resurrection. 5 took place on Resurrection Sunday, and 5 in the weeks that followed. He appeared to 3 people privately; the rest were in groups during which he also had some personal conversations with some of them.

I noticed that his appearances were very purposeful and intentional and there were two conversations he had that I want to focus on this morning. These conversations were with two of his disciples that had started wandering after he died on the cross and continued to struggle after he rose from the dead.

Easter Sunday is usually a day when more people come to church than any other Sunday. Many of those are regular church attenders, but many are not. Some people come because they're visiting family for the holiday, some because it's a tradition to go to church on Easter, and some are struggling in life and looking for answers and it makes sense to go to church on Easter to look. I don't know what brought you here this morning, but many of us might be coming in from a time of wandering...

- Maybe life hasn't gone as expected and you're disillusioned with God.
- Maybe you've gone through suffering and felt he wasn't there.
- Maybe you had a bad church experience and that's kept you away.
- Maybe you're just too busy and Sundays are no longer free.
- Maybe you've gotten in the habit of sleeping in.

Whatever it is, you might be wandering this morning and if so, I want you to see the conversations Jesus had with two of his disciples.

If you were a disciple of Jesus, his death on the cross would have been a very traumatic experience for you. You would have faced disillusionment, despair, and even guilt. Jesus had warned them he was going to die, but it was still a

shock when it happened. They didn't understand. Things didn't go the way they wanted or planned. Their hopes and dreams were crushed. They had given up everything to follow Jesus, and now all seemed lost. And to make it worse, when the soldiers had come to arrest Jesus, the disciples all fled in fear. It would have been easier to stay if they could have fought, but Jesus didn't let them. He willingly gave himself up to be arrested. So they fled.

So there was guilt, shock, disillusionment and despair. And then there was wandering. Kind of like someone in an accident who goes into shock, and they're just kind of wandering around not sure what to do.

One of those disciples was Thomas. Not much was written about him in the gospels, but John has a couple stories near the end of Jesus' ministry. One took place when Jesus decided to go to Judea after his friend Lazarus had died. Judea was a very dangerous place for him because the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him. They had just been trying to stone him. So when he told his disciples he wanted to go there, they thought he was a little crazy. But Jesus insisted and Thomas was the first to give in, and here's what he said in John 11:16: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." I'm hearing a little Eeyore in that comment: "Well, I guess we better go with, so we can all die together..."

Another story about Thomas is in the Upper Room when Jesus broke the news to his disciples that he would be leaving. He told them he was going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them and that they knew the way to where he was going. But Thomas was confused, so in John 14:5 he said: "*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*" He, and all the other disciples were really struggling to figure out what was about to happen.

Well then the unthinkable happened and Thomas' life was turned upside down. Jesus was arrested and before anyone could stop it, he was crucified and he died. Shock, disbelief, disillusionment. What in the world was going on? Thomas was deeply hurt. So deeply that his heart and mind were filled with doubt and he began to wander. Even after he started to hear reports that Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to all the other disciples, he refused to believe. He said in John 20:25: "*Unless I see in his hands the mark*

of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Again, I see Eeyore – melancholy, pessimism, unbelief, continuing to wander. And I think Jesus knew that and had compassion. And I want you to see what he did.

Read John 20:26-28.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

I think Jesus appeared that day just for Thomas. He knew what he needed and wanted to put a permanent end to his unbelief, doubt and wandering. He loved Thomas and wanted him to come back and get plugged in again.

Jesus loves you too, and if you've been walking the road of doubt and disillusionment and wandering, he wants you to see him again on this Resurrection Day standing before you and calling you to believe. Come back to Jesus and put your trust in him. He has never left you and wants you to come back to him again.

Now I want us to look at another disciple – this time Peter. Like Thomas, Peter would have gone through a lot of shock, disillusionment, and despair after Jesus died. But on top of that, I think he would have felt a lot of guilt. Of all the disciples in the Upper Room, Peter insisted most that he would never deny Jesus – even if he faced prison or death, he would never disown him. Peter was bold and one of the leaders of the group – one of Jesus’ closest friends. But later that evening, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter ran away with the rest of the disciples. He even denied knowing him 3 times that night. And then the rooster crowed...

Peter did what he thought he’d never do, and it cut him deeply to the heart. He ran away and wept bitterly. If I was in Peter’s shoes I would have been filled with guilt. And even after Jesus rose from the dead and had interactions with

him along with the other disciples, that guilt would have sat there and made him feel unworthy – unworthy to be Jesus’ friend, unworthy to be forgiven, and unworthy to lead the disciples. I think Peter’s guilt led him on a path of wandering, and for him it meant going back to work, and doing what he did before he met Jesus. He went back to fishing and his old way of life.

That’s where he was when Jesus appeared and performed a miracle – the same miracle that convinced Peter to follow him in the first place. He and some of the other disciples had been fishing all night and hadn’t caught anything. But someone from shore called out: “Cast your net on the other side of the boat.” And when they did, their nets were filled to overflowing. They knew it was the Lord.

Peter literally jumped into the water and swam to shore to see Jesus who was preparing breakfast for them. I think Jesus knew he was struggling and wanted to bring him and the other disciples back to that day when they first left their nets to follow him. After his death on the cross and their season of wandering, I think he was calling them back to himself, back to discipleship, and back to the mission. And I think he especially wanted to connect with Peter, the one who denied him three times, and make it clear that he was forgiven and it was time to move forward.

Listen to what happened in John 21:15-17: *“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”¹⁶ He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”*

Why did Jesus ask him the same thing three times? I think Peter knew exactly why and I think that’s what hit him when Jesus asked him the third time: “Do you love me?” Peter had been wandering in guilt and shame since denying Jesus, feeling unworthy to be his disciple, but now Jesus was making it clear he wanted him back. His sins were forgiven, and it was time to move forward.

For each time Peter denied him, Jesus gave him the chance to affirm his love and restore him to ministry.

Jesus loved Peter and wanted him to come back and get plugged in. And Jesus loves you too. Maybe like Peter you've been wandering from God in guilt and shame because of things you've done. Maybe you feel unworthy and like God could never love you, never forgive you.

But because of what Christ did on the cross, your sins can be forgiven. He paid the penalty. He died so you could live – not in bondage to guilt and condemnation, but in freedom and friendship with God. Jesus rose from the dead to prove that the penalty for sin had been paid and he's here today calling you to come back to him. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

If you've been wandering – maybe like Thomas, maybe like Peter, or whatever the reason, today is the day to turn away from your wandering. Today is the day to come back to Jesus and live. He died and he rose again, and that changes everything. He's given you life so that you can find life that's truly life, and join him in his mission to spread the light of his glory to people lost in darkness. Come to him and turn away from your wandering.