

## **Positional Vertigo**

**Luke 24: 13-35**

**1 Peter 1: 17-23**

Have any of you ever experienced what is called benign positional vertigo? We have; well, that is, I mean Peter has. He walked down to the mailbox one Saturday afternoon, and became so dizzy that he could hardly make it back up the driveway. After that initial episode, and until it resolved itself, every time he changed position – getting up from bed or standing up out of a chair or just moving his head a certain way – every time, things would get a little spongy and the room would start to spin.

Positional vertigo is a disorder of the inner ear. Somehow faulty signals are sent through the fluid and sensors in the semicircular canals that tell your brain that your head is still moving even after it stops.

What causes it? They're not sure. It could be any number of things, like a virus or an injury or stress. But it certainly disrupts your life for a while.

**Jesus caused a kind of positional vertigo among his disciples and other followers.** No matter what position they happened to be in at the time, Jesus disrupted it and made their heads spin. In this morning's scripture, for example, we find two of them – Cleopas and an unnamed other - walking to Emmaus, walking along and talking about what had happened in Jerusalem, talking about Jesus. And Jesus, incognito to them, appeared on the road and asked them what it was that had happened. And they told him everything, even down to the astonishing report of the empty tomb.

Then Jesus did something that must have sent their heads spinning. He said, *“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe”...Then*

*beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.* They still didn't know who he was at that point but they must have begun to question. Later they recall how their hearts were burning within them when Jesus revealed the scriptures. Here they were walking along that ordinary road and someone quite extraordinary begins to make that road seem a little spongy.

The day draws to a close and Cleopas and his friend invite Jesus to stay with them a while longer, stay and have dinner. So their physical positions change; now they are sitting at table together. And Jesus did it again- made them dizzy with revelation from God. *...he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

So inspired were they that they immediately change positions again, even though it was night and not the time for travel. *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem* and told the eleven disciples about what had happened on the road and at the table.

**Jesus has this power – to disrupt, to disorient, to cause positional vertigo. And not just physically. Think of the other ways that the word ‘position’ can be understood.**

First, there is ‘position on issues.’” What do you think about the current discussions concerning immigration? Genetic manipulation? Global warming? Torture? The economy? Preserving farmland? The war in Iraq? How might you consider these issues differently if you saw into them with the eyes and heart of Jesus? With the eyes of justice and love and compassion and peace? **Might Jesus shake your comfortable position, especially when really hearing him and listening might also mean some sort of action on your part?**

Then there is the position you hold in your career, that helps to identify who you are. Law partner. High school teacher with tenure (or not). Hospital staff physician. Self-employed accountant. Real estate broker in a multi-office firm. Retired engineer. Choir section leader. Full-time mother. Currently unemployed. **But Jesus says that none of these positions is as significant as the one he reminds us of and that is the position of beloved child of God.**

We have no idea what Cleopas did for a living and we don't even know the name of the one who accompanied him. We do know that Jesus called the disciples from the work they were doing – as fishermen, tax collector, whatever – and said, “Follow me.” No matter what your profession or job and no matter what title you hold, Jesus would have you set that aside in importance and working within your calling, say to yourself, How can I listen to what Jesus is saying to me in this life?

Finally, and somewhat related to the last idea, there is the position you hold in life, your status or rank, usually measured socially and economically - how rich you are, what kind of house you live in, the car you drive, the clothes you wear, the vacations you take. **We all know what Jesus had to say about worldly wealth and position – the last shall be first and the first last.** Jesus upends our ways of thinking and challenges our ways of measuring the value of a person.

We also see this idea in the working of the churches born in the Reformation. The offices of elder, deacon and minister of Word and Sacrament are not hierarchical. One does not rank higher than another; they just have different tasks associated with them. As Paul said, some are called to be teachers, some apostles, some prophets and so on. But it is the one Holy Spirit that unites them in the body of Christ.

However you want to consider this term ‘position’, Jesus has a way of causing positional vertigo. All you have to do is come up against him face to face once, like Cleopas and his friend, and you will know that life will never be the same. **The positional vertigo of Jesus will not ‘just resolve itself’ and go away. No, once you experience that vertigo, you become a changed person.**

The passage that Dottie read from the first letter of Peter clearly calls attention to that fact: *Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.* Earlier verses in this letter tell the reader, or the hearer, *to prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you...as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.* The underlying assumption is that we were brought into the servant community in order to live as people manifesting the saving love of God.

For Cleopas and his friend, Jesus was made known in the breaking of the bread. *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.* Perhaps that will be the case for you here today at this Communion table. Or perhaps it will have been, as it was for me, in a few moments of intense suffering relieved by equally intense prayer.

**Or perhaps it is yet to be, that time when Jesus is revealed to you and you grow dizzy with the very idea that God can come so close.**

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