

**“Emmaus Never Happened; Emmaus Always Happens”  
 Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson  
 St. Paul’s United Church, Orillia  
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**Let us pray:**

**Creative Christ spirit, open our eyes and our hearts,  
 our minds and our lives to your presence  
 that walks the journey of life with us,  
 upholding us, challenging us,  
 encouraging us and nudging us  
 to let your presence be known to the world through our lives.  
 Amen.**

**A passenger in a taxi leaned over to ask the driver a question  
 and tapped him on the shoulder.  
 The driver screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus,  
 drove up over the curb, and stopped just inches  
 from a large plate glass window.  
 For a few moments, everything was silent in the cab,  
 and then the still shaking driver said,  
 "I'm sorry, but that scared the daylights out of me."  
 The frightened passenger apologized to the driver and said he  
 didn't realize a mere tap on the shoulder could frighten him so much.  
 "No, no, I'm sorry," said the driver. "It's entirely my fault.  
 Today is my first day driving a cab.  
 For the last 25 years, I've been driving a hearse."**

**Yes, we can feel like such fools when unexpected things happen in life.  
 But it is often in those unexpected moments  
 that we are awakened to the presence of  
 those who walk with us in life.**

**Imagine what the conversation might have been like in our gospel story,  
 Luke 24:13-35, after Jesus disappeared:**

**One: I feel such a fool!**

**Two: Yeah, but I looked a fool! All that talking we did with him.  
 All that “Are you the only one not to have heard?  
 Have you been hiding somewhere?  
 Do you know nothing of what happened?”**

**One:** How could we not have known?  
**Two:** I can't believe we didn't recognize him!  
**One:** Until the bread was broken!  
**Two:** Yes, until he broke the bread.  
**One:** Then all of heaven's light reflected in those eyes.  
**Two:** And his voice echoed round us as if we were  
sitting amidst heaven's mountains.  
**One:** And we stared.  
**Two:** Silenced.  
**One:** In awe.  
**Two:** Shocked.  
**One:** Comforted.  
**Two:** Amazed.  
**One:** Reassured.  
**Two:** Astonished.  
**One:** Loved.  
**Two:** Yes, loved.  
**One:** I still feel like a fool.  
**Two:** And I know I looked a fool  
**One:** It won't be the last time.  
**Two:** Let's go and tell the others of how we felt Jesus' presence,  
of how Christ walked with us.

There was once a little boy who decided he wanted to find God.  
He knew it would probably be a long trip, so he decided to pack a lunch:  
four packs of Twinkies and two cans of root beer.  
He set out on his journey and went a few blocks until he came to a park.  
On one of the park benches sat an old woman looking at the pigeons.

The little boy sat down beside her and watched the pigeons too.  
When he grew hungry, he pulled out some Twinkies.  
As he ate, he noticed the woman watching him, so he offered her one.  
She accepted gratefully and smiled at him.  
He thought she had the most beautiful smile in the world.  
Wanting to see it again, he opened a can of root beer  
and offered her the other one.  
Once again she smiled that beautiful smile.

For a long time the two sat on that park bench eating Twinkies,

drinking root beer, smiling at each other, and watching the pigeons.

Neither said a word.

Finally, the little boy realized that it was getting late  
and he needed to go home.

He started to leave, took a few steps, turned back  
and gave the woman a big hug.

Her smile was brighter than ever before.

When he arrived home, his mother noticed that he was happy,  
but strangely quiet.

'What did you do today?' she asked.

'Oh, I had lunch in the park with God,' he said.

Before his mother could reply, he added,

'You know, she has the most beautiful smile in the world.'

Meanwhile, the old woman left the park and returned to her home.

Her son noticed something different about her.

'What did you do today, Mom?' he asked.

'Oh, I ate Twinkies and drank root beer in the park with God.'

And before her son could say anything at all, she added,

'You know, God's a lot younger than I imagined'.

Our sermon title today is "Emmaus Never Happens;  
Emmaus Always Happens". That's a quote from Dom Crossan.

Archeologically, Emmaus does not exist.

A road to Emmaus never has been found.

Biblical scholars believe that the story is in the traditional Jewish style  
of telling stories to tell a truth.

Though there isn't a physical Emmaus, Emmaus still happens.

It happens today. It happens everywhere.

It's not about a geographical place; it's about an experience  
as we walk along the road of life and we experience again and again  
the risen Christ walking with us—

not always known by us, yet walking with us, encouraging us,  
challenging us, and helping us discover the fullness of life  
that we already know deep within our hearts.

Everywhere, God's love is with us, and we are called to share God's  
presence with others who walk with us.

There is a field, with two horses in it.  
 From a distance, each horse looks like any other horse.  
 But if you stop your car, or are walking by,  
 you will notice something quite amazing.  
 Looking into the eyes of one horse will disclose that he is blind.  
 His owner has chosen not to have him put down,  
 but has made a good home for him.  
 This alone is amazing.

If you stand nearby and listen, you will hear the sound of a bell.  
 Looking around for the source of the sound,  
 you will see that it comes from the smaller horse in the field.  
 Attached to the horse's halter is a small bell.  
 It lets the blind friend know where the other horse is, so he can follow.

As you stand and watch these two horses,  
 you'll see that the horse with the bell is always checking on the blind  
 horse, and that the blind horse will listen for the bell  
 and then slowly walk to where the other horse is,  
 trusting that he will not be led astray.  
 When the horse with the bell returns to the shelter of the barn each  
 evening, it stops occasionally and looks back,  
 making sure that the blind friend isn't too far behind to hear the bell.

Like the owner of these two horses,  
 God does not throw us away just because  
 we are not perfect or because we have problems or challenges.  
 God watches over us and even brings others into our lives  
 to help us when we are in need.  
 Sometimes we are the blind horse being guided by the little ringing bell  
 of those whom God places in our lives.  
 Other times we are the guide horse, helping others to find their way....

Good friends are like that... you may not always see them,  
 but you know they are always there.  
 The story ends with this invitation:  
 Please listen for my bell and I'll listen for yours.  
 Remember...be kinder than necessary.  
 Everyone you meet is fighting  
 some kind of battle.

**Decades ago, Niebuhr wrote about the work of the church  
and the blessing that the church is in society.**

**This past week, I had lunch with a friend, Jim Patterson,  
who is with the Toronto United Church Council.**

**He and I are on an advisory committee that is working  
to raise \$20 million in the next five years.**

**I always love my conversations with Jim.**

**He is so insightful and always encourages me  
in the work we are doing here at St. Paul's**

**He shared a summary of Niebuhr and what he said the church is about.**

**It struck me, and it stayed with me:**

- **We need to tell the story of God's love in a way that it is  
relevant to our life today.**
- **As the church, we are one of the few places where we are a  
community that truly cares for one another—  
not always fully and successfully,  
but that's our intention and our hope.**
- **As the church, we need to look at ourselves and see where we are  
failing this world. We need to work on these ways and then go  
out into the world and work on these areas of concern.**

**In the history of the United Church of Canada, we have seen a need and  
been part of the energy behind things such as—**

**universal medicare, public schools, and**

**the beginning of schooling for autistic children,**

**which developed out of a school started in a Toronto United Church.**

**Issues we need to have a voice in today include ecology and refugees.**

**We are a voice that's calling for change.**

**The church makes a significant impact on society around us,**

**if we truly live those three callings of Niebuhr's.**

**And we live those callings as a large church community,**

**but also as individuals.**

**Dr. Tony Campolo, in his film series, *You Can Make a Difference*,  
tells the story of a Christian colleague with a PhD. in English Literature  
who quit his job and became a mailman**

**because Christ opened up a new tomorrow in his life.**

**Tony went to the man's apartment to try to persuade him  
to change his mind.**

Here is how Tony describes that encounter:

"I couldn't change his mind, so I came back with  
the old Protestant work ethic thing.

I said, "Charlie, if you're gonna be a mailman,  
be the best mailman you can be."

"He looked at me with a silly grin and said, 'I'm a lousy mailman.'"

"I asked, 'What do you mean, you're a lousy mailman?'"

"He answered, 'Everybody else gets the mail delivered by one o'clock;  
I never get back until five thirty or six.'"

"What takes so long?" I wanted to know.

"He said, 'I visit! That's why it takes so long.

You wouldn't believe how many people on my route never got visited  
until I became the mailman.

But I've got this problem, I can't sleep at night."

"I asked, 'Why can't you sleep?'"

"He said, 'Who can sleep after drinking twenty cups of coffee?'"

"I began to get the image of this mailman on the job.

He was no ordinary mailman.

I could picture him going from door to door  
and at each home giving more than the mail.

I could see him visiting solitary widows, counselling troubled teenagers,  
joking with lonely old men.

I could see him delivering the mail in a way that was extra-ordinary  
for the people on his route.

He's the only mailman I know that on his birthday the people on his  
route get together, hire out a gym, and throw a party for him.

They love him because he's a mailman  
who expresses the love of Jesus everywhere he goes.

In his own subtle way, my friend Charles is changing his world,  
changing the lives of people, touching them where they are,  
making a difference in their lives.

It may not sound like much, but that man  
who is delivering mail like Jesus would deliver mail  
is an agent of God  
who is changing the world."

We are called to make a difference in this world.  
But sometimes, we're too busy speeding through life.

When we slow down, amazing things can happen.  
There's a great story that I just love about the importance of listening,  
so that we can make a difference in this world.

It's the story of a young and successful executive  
who was travelling down a neighbourhood street  
going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar.  
He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars  
and slowed down when he thought he saw something.  
As his car passed, no children appeared.  
Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag's side door!  
He slammed on the brakes and backed the Jag up to the spot  
where the brick had been thrown.  
The angry driver then jumped out of the car, grabbed the nearest  
kid and pushed him up against a parked car shouting,  
"What was that all about and who are you?  
Just what the heck are you doing?  
That's a new car and that brick you threw  
is going to cost a lot of money.  
Why did you do it?"

The young boy was apologetic.  
"Please, mister...please, I'm sorry  
but I didn't know what else to do," he pleaded.  
"I threw the brick because no one else would stop."  
With tears dripping down his face and off his chin,  
the youth pointed to a spot just around a parked car.  
"It's my brother," he said.  
"He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and  
I can't lift him up."

Now sobbing, the boy asked the stunned executive,  
"Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair?  
He's hurt and he's too heavy for me."  
Moved beyond words, the driver tried to  
swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat.  
He hurriedly lifted the handicapped boy back into the  
wheelchair, then took out a linen handkerchief and  
dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts.  
A quick look told him everything was going to be okay.

**"Thank you and may God bless you,"  
the grateful child told the stranger.**

**Too shook up for words, the man simply watched the boy push his  
wheelchair-bound brother down the sidewalk toward their home .**

**It was a long, slow walk back to the Jaguar.**

**The damage was very noticeable,**

**but the driver never bothered to repair the dented side door.**

**He kept the dent there to remind him of this message**

**"Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you  
to get your attention!"**

**God whispers in our souls and speaks to our hearts.**

**Sometimes when we don't have time to listen,**

**God has to throw a brick at us.**

**It's our choice to listen or not.**

**I received this the other day, with the question, "What's a Billion?"  
"A billion is a difficult number to comprehend, but one advertising  
agency did a good job of putting that figure into some perspective  
in one of its releases.**

**a) a billion seconds ago, it was 1959.**

**b) a billion minutes ago, Jesus was alive.**

**c) a billion hours ago, our ancestors were living in the Stone Age.**

**d) A billion days ago, no-one walked on the earth on two feet.**

**e) A billion dollars ago was only 8 hours and 20 minutes,  
at the rate the government is spending it."**

**We spend all that money, and yet there are still people dying of hunger,  
dying for lack of clean water,  
dying for lack of drugs that are available to treat HIV/AIDS—  
but not to them.**

**Yet there's good news.**

**Reading through the *Packet & Times* last night,**

**I came across two encouraging articles.**

**One was by Pat Bedford on the work that Mariposa Grandmothers are  
doing with the African grandmothers, who are the real heroes.**

**She tells of how, through the Stephen Lewis Foundation,**

**African and Canadian grandmothers got together**

**with great apprehension in August 2006.**

**But their combined courage paid off.**

An excerpt from their time together tells how  
 “The age-old African ways of speaking without words broke down  
 communication barriers.

We gestured and nodded. And we sang.

We danced. We drummed.

We laughed and clapped and wept and hugged.

Through our new discovery—grandmother to grandmother solidarity—  
 we carried ourselves and one another through the grief.”

And the grandmothers movement was born.

It has grown immensely since then.

The story directly below it, by Amber McGarvey,  
 tells about baby Isabella,

who brings a smile to the face of a Hospice client.

It’s a wonderful story.

Isabella is Amber’s niece, just two months old.

Amber takes her to visit the Hospice client whom she sees regularly.

He’s seventy-something old.

Around this baby, he’s a completely different person.

His face lights up with excitement the moment Amber and the baby  
 enter the room.

The presence of God is there when we allow the light  
 to shine through us.

Here’s a wonderful quote from Albert Camus:

Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow.

Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead.

Walk beside me and be my friend.

We are called to be the power of God’s love.

We are called to notice the power of God’s love

in the midst of ordinary life, a life that is truly filled with faith  
 when we allow love to blossom and to be that presence in the world.

May it be so in our lives and in our world.

Amen.