

Tom James  
April 6, 2008  
Luke 24.13-32  
“Stay With Us”

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None of us really knows very much about God, if the truth be told. There are an awful lot of people who think they do—or at least would like you to think that they do. God caused this or God feels this way about that. God is on our side or (less typically) God is on their side. God intends this for you, or wants to keep you from that. But the truth is, we really don't know. We are ignorant. We are kept in the dark. There is an uncrossable chasm, an abyss, that stretches between our feeble minds and the infinite mind of God.

It's good to keep that in mind. It keeps us appropriately humble, and it also fends of the temptation so prevalent in a technological age to assume that mystery is simply another name for what we haven't discovered yet but will very soon.

But I wonder if there isn't something about our ignorance of God that is more than a cautionary note. I wonder if our ignorance about God may not actually be a positive spiritual resource, a source of strength and vitality. The great theologian Karl Rahner, who wrote a twenty-something volume work called “Theological Investigations,” undoubtedly one of the most learned religious minds of the twentieth century, once remarked that all we know about God is like a tiny island in the middle of a vast ocean of mystery. “What do you love more,” he asked, “the tiny island or the vast ocean?”

It seems like our disciple friends on the road to Emmaus were spiritually at sea. Jesus had turned their world upside down, together with all their assumptions about life and death, and good and evil, and then in a moment he was gone. Crucified. Summarily executed. Gotten rid of. Silenced. And yet the conversation between them churned on, like the restless waves of a storm-driven sea. There was energy, life, surging in their words and their wondering. Their doubts and their dreams chased each other like swirling currents, pushing and pulling them across the waters further and further away from their island homes.

And, somehow, it seems that Jesus' world-upending hadn't completed its work. It is interesting, and fitting, that these two disciples didn't recognize Jesus when he joined them to stir them up further. It is fitting to our own perplexity that we cannot imagine what this must have been like. But I'm convinced that as Jesus explained things to these disciples their sense of wonder did not decrease but increased. And as he continued to speak to them I'm sure that their sense of mystery deepened right up until the moment when Jesus broke the bread, “and their eyes were opened.” It wasn't that all of a sudden everything made perfect sense to them—it was that they had been ushered directly into the deepest of mysteries: God's power to make victory out of defeat, and to bring life out of death.

As they walked with Jesus along the road, these disciples had to beckon Jesus not to walk past them and into the distance. They had to appeal to him: “stay with us.” That is every disciple's prayer. It is the prayer that we should bring with us to this table. “Stay with me.” Don't leave me to my self-satisfaction. Don't abandon me to my easy certainties and my self-constructed sense of security. “Stay with me.” Draw me onward, further into the mystery. Usher me into those places where I may see how you are making the way for unexpected victory in my life, where you are empowering me to live in the face of death and disappointment, where you are opening pathways through the restless waves of the wide-open waters. “Stay with me.” Christ, you are the resurrection and the life. Don't walk ahead. Stay with me. Amen.