

-It's hard to believe that 3 years ago, Abby and I had great misgivings about coming to Montana. You see, after I graduated from seminary, we had it all figured out. (sound similar to some of your life experiences?) Abby was going to apply and get accepted into a "Food Studies" Masters program, maybe in California, or Oregon, or Washington State (we were a little flexible in that, of course). I was then going to get a little congregation somewhere near the school, start a young adult engagement ministry of some kind, and live a happy, hipster, city dweller life. It was a flawless plan. Then I get a call from Bishop Jessica Crist of the Montana Synod. One of the first sentences she said to me was: "Welcome to Montana, but don't cry yet." She had some suggestions of me beginning to interview with churches maybe in Butte and Anaconda. I can't remember exactly because I have blotted it out of my mind. I was in shock. This wasn't according to plan. After getting off the phone and telling Abby, I remember her tearfully looking me in the eyes and saying? "What the bleep am I going to do in Montana?"

-Granted, I admit, this story is not as horrifying as Christ getting crucified on the cross. But, I can sympathize a little with Cleopas and the other disciples as they are walking down the road to Emmaus when he says: "we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."(verse 21). Maybe you can sympathize a little too. I think this phrase could be used a lot for many different situations: "I had hoped that I would have gotten a church in Seattle, WA." Maybe you could say to yourself: "I had hoped that our son/daughter would go to college." "I had hoped that I would have this job for the rest of my career." "I had hoped that I would be retired right now." This statement to Jesus on the road to Emmaus I think is one of human experience.

-All of us have plans, hopes, and dreams. So what do we do when something doesn't turn out exactly as we had planned out?

-It's interesting to me how these disciples, as they walked along, were throwing around ideas and concepts that they couldn't recognize as real. "These women have said that there is no body in the tomb.....probably was stolen or something." "How has this stranger not heard of Jesus being killed? Must be living under a rock or something.." Even Jesus himself explaining the scripture to them along the way did not sway them.

-Maybe we can read this story as God doing some magic or something and "shielding the true identity of Jesus" from these disciples. However, I don't think it was God who was doing the shielding, but the disciples' own expectations.

-Most of these disciples followed Jesus with the expectation that he would lead a radical revolution against Rome. I'm sure many thought they might be leading rebellions all over the empire with many dreaming of political freedom once and for all. In a way, they put God in a box. I had hoped that God must work THIS way. Instead, this is not what God did. It was much bigger than that, but these disciples couldn't recognize it.

-What are our expectations of God? Are we blinded sometimes by these expectations?

-I have mentioned before that Abby and I are into murder mysteries on Netflix. We are currently watching the series "Foyle's War", a show that follows police detective Christopher Foyle solving murder mysteries in England during World War 2.

What makes this show fascinating to watch is Foyle noticing all of the little things that "don't seem to make sense." One of the big reasons why this character is so successful at solving mysteries is because he never settles for "that's the way it seems." He always works in a quiet, low key, manner: always being shown having a whiskey before he goes to bed. His questions to other characters are always quiet, calm, but to the point. He quite clearly is very good at leaving himself space to think out of the box which is why this show is so engaging.

-Maybe we can take a cue from Christopher Foyle, the detective sergeant, in slowing down and making space for ourselves in our own lives.

-It's interesting to me in this story at what moment these disciples saw Jesus. They did not recognize the risen Jesus until they "got off the road", slowed down, and broke bread together. They were spending all of this energy and effort in debating Jesus on the road that they couldn't recognize him until they finally took a pause and were able to take God out of their "expectations box." God did more than what their limited understanding could understand. If they didn't slow down, they would have missed it.

-So what does this slowing down mean for us?

-There is another pastor who writes about an important formula that can maybe help us slow down from our expectations: "blessed, broke, shared." Jesus blessed the bread. Jesus broke the bread. Jesus shared the bread. This is what the church is all about if you think about it right? Blessing, breaking, sharing. It's so simple, yet, can lead us to seeing God doing extraordinary "out of the box" kind of things.

-Every month, a group of young adults (20's-30's) meets to discuss a poem or writing that has to do with spirituality. We each bring a "potluck" dish to share and eat while digging into these texts. During our gathering this last week, many of us shared that this was one of the highlights of our week. A lot of us stayed long after the dinner hour eating and talking until Linsey finally had to say "Elam has school tomorrow, we gotta rap this up." Bless, break, share. Maybe it is the senior lunch at the senior center in Missoula every week, or coffee with friends, or youth group, or bible study. Whatever it is, what are your bless, break, share moments? What moments allow you to slow down a little bit and notice some new things to what God is up to?

-These are the moments where we can see anew and not get too caught up for ourselves. These are the moments where plans can radically change and it's OK. These are the moments where we can lead on each other and take those leaps of faith. These are the moments when we don't have to be enslaved to our expectations and our "perfect plans". Sometimes it takes us to get off the road, to slow down, to break, bless,

and share with each other in order to *really* God and what God is up to in this world. Will you join me?