

## Known By His Gratitude (Luke 24:13-16, 28-35)

About two weeks ago I received a phone call. **[slide: image of phone, land line but modern]** The caller ID did not list a name, just a number, so I did not know who was calling. I answered the phone and a voice said, “Martin, how are you doing?” I said “Fine.” But I was wondering, who is this person? He said, “I just read your new book and loved it.” I said “Thank you.” But I was still wondering, who is this person. Then he said, “Congratulations on the appointment to Brentwood.” All the while I was thinking, who in the world is this person? Finally, he said a few more sentences, and the light came on and I figured out who I was talking to. It was another pastor in the Conference that I had not seen in a long time. **[end slide]**

I’m sure that has happened to everyone here today. You get a phone call, or maybe even see someone in person that you’ve not seen in many years, and at first you don’t recognize them. But then, all of a sudden, the light comes on, and you recognize them.

That’s the story behind today’s scripture reading. **[slide: art image of Emmaus Road story]** In this story, two of the followers of Jesus are walking down the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It’s Sunday afternoon on Easter Sunday. As they were walking on the road, Jesus joined them. At first they did not recognize him. Why? There are numerous theories. But regardless of the reason, they did not know it was Jesus. As the three of them walked down the road, they engaged in a long conversation. Finally, when they got to Emmaus, the two men invited Jesus for dinner. Before they ate, they asked Jesus to say grace over the meal. **[slide: theme slide image of Jesus breaking bread and giving thanks]** He took the bread, broke it, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them. And when he did, their eyes were opened. The light came on. They realized it was Jesus. In short, they recognized Jesus by his gratitude. When he lifted the bread to heaven and thanked God, that’s when they knew it was Jesus. **[end slide]**

It’s profoundly significant that Jesus was recognized by his gratitude. And that gratitude was not a one time deal. Throughout his entire ministry, Jesus exhibited a grateful spirit. He was thankful to God for every good gift. In many ways, gratitude defined him.

Through the years I’ve known several people like that, people whose primary characteristic is gratitude. That was true of my grandfather. What I most remember about him was his overwhelming thankfulness for the gifts of life. My granddad had very little

in terms of wealth. He lived almost all of his life in a small wood frame house. He worked forty years as a meter reader for the gas company. He had no social status in town. He wasn't a member of the country club or Rotary or the Chamber of Commerce. And yet, he was the most grateful man I've ever known. I remember Sunday lunches at his home. Before we ate, he said grace. And in that prayer he thanked God for the food, and for his family, and for his church, and for his friends, and for Jesus. And it was such a *sincere* prayer. He was grateful for every gift of life, no matter how small or simple.

My most vivid memory of my granddad is the funeral service for his wife, my grandmother. They had been married over 50 years. When the service was over, everyone left the church except the family. My granddad stood over the casket, weeping in grief. But in spite of his overwhelming grief, he offered a remarkable prayer. He said, "Lord, thank you for my wonderful wife. Thank you for the fifty years we had together. Thank you for her love. Thank you for the children you blessed us with." Here he was, in overwhelming pain and grief, and yet he was full of thanksgiving. He was, like Jesus in today's text, known by others by his gratitude.

It's no accident that my grandfather was also one of the most happy and contented persons I've ever known. I have no doubt his contentment and happiness was the direct result of his life of gratitude. In fact, over the past decade, science has proven that the happiest people in the world are not people with a lot of money or power or fame. No, the happiest people in the world are people who constantly practice gratitude. One of the leading scholars in American on happiness once wrote, **[slide with quote: "The expression of gratitude is a kind of metastrategy for achieving happiness."]** And the really beautiful thing about all of this is that being grateful is not complicated or expensive. We can easily practice it everyday. **[end slide]** The best way I know to practice gratitude is through gratitude prayers. I do it all the time. Every day, throughout the day, I briefly thank God for the gifts of the day, no matter how small. And life is far sweeter as a result.

It's a profound and significant thing that in today's text, Jesus was known by his gratitude. We would do well to follow his example and live a life of constant thanksgiving. In fact, it would be a worthy goal to practice thankfulness so much that we, like Jesus, are known by our gratitude.

A few months ago my mother sent me an article about a United Methodist minister in Arkansas who recently retired. The article included a section called, "Self Portrait." In this section, the retired pastor was asked to answer several questions including: what was his favorite book, what was the best advice he ever got, what was his pet peeve, and what he was most looking forward to in retirement. The last question was, **[slide: "What one word would sum you up?"]** His answer was **[(add to slide, after a pause, right as I say the word) "Thankful."]** May that be true in your life and in mine.