The Greatest Text

The greatest text, for me, in the whole Bible is not a beautiful poem or psalm. It is not a theological narrative like the great prologue to John's Gospel. It is not an emotional theological confession like Romans 8. It is not one of the provocative sayings, parables, or teachings of Jesus. It is not the mysterious and beautiful poetic story of the origin of the world that we have in the opening chapter of Genesis. It is not a haunting prophetic book about the past, present, and future such as Isaiah or Revelation. It is not one of the staggering accounts of the intense presence of God in the temple, or the account of God's appearance to Elijah on Horeb with rocks shattering all around Him. It is not even the various Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is not even the command of Jesus to love God and our neighbor. I would acknowledge that the text "Jesus wept" has great significance for me, as it does for many others, but there is a text that surpasses even that one in my mind.

The greatest text to me occurs in a simple conversation that Jesus had with two of his disciples after his resurrection. In Luke 24:13-32, we read about two of Jesus' disciples walking dejectedly in the area surrounding Jerusalem after Jesus was crucified. These two disciples had been unimpressed with the report of some women that Jesus was not in the tomb. As these disciples were wandering off on their own, conversing with each other about the things that had just transpired, Jesus walked up and asked them what they were talking about. They did not recognize him. One of the disciples, Cleopas, incredulously snaps back, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" So, Jesus playfully inquires, "What things?"

As if he didn't know-- after dying on the cross for our sins and being raised from the dead! Jesus' response to his disciples, in the face of their unbelief, began with playfulness and humor! The disciples would not have seen it because they did not even know who he was. But Luke writes for us, and we can see it. The victorious Lord responds to the disciples' snapping at him with a very simple question in which we, but not the disciples, observe the ultimate understatement. The understatement gives us a window through which we can observe the humble nature of our Lord who does not blast his disciples for their unbelief, but rather converses with them so calmly, even playfully. This is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The shepherd goes after his lost sheep, every one of them. This is grace. We should note that the disciples subsequently recognized Jesus as he blessed some bread at supper and broke it. We should be disciplined about participating in Communion and prepare ourselves each time. We can imagine that after this, the disciples must have been amazed as they realized the humility, playfulness, and forgiveness that their Lord had exercised toward them. A spirit of surprise and joy certainly prevailed over any feelings of being ashamed for not believing the women.

An understanding of this passage does not require a knowledge of the Greek. It does not require great literary skills or knowledge of history. It does not require analysis of any type. Understanding this passage only requires imagination and faith. It requires some experience of playing when we were children.

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