

Good Morning,

Many of you know that Jan and I will not be here for the next two Sundays because we are going to Puerto Rico for our winter vacation. Once in Puerto Rico we will be taking a cruise to the southern Caribbean. Wait, wait, wait, wait, I need to stop our message at this point because I just realized how insensitive it was for me to come to the pulpit and tell everyone what I just told you. Can you believe that I just told all of you that Jan and I are not going to be experiencing winter for two weeks. What kind of a person does something like that! Well I have to be honest to all of you and admit that it appears that I am that kind of a person. Ok, now that you know that I have an insensitive side to me I have decided to not bring up last week's playoff football games. Can you believe that one team is being accused of deflating the football? I bet you thought I was going to mention that my son-in-law Seahawks won their game over the Green Bay Packers. Nope I am not going to mention that because that would be another example of being insensitive and not understanding the feelings of Packer fans. But I have to admit that I was sort of rooting for the Packers but I knew that if they beat the Seahawks my son-in-law would not be having a good day. So now that I have all of my insensitivity out of my system I need to get back to our message this morning. Well since I have already mentioned going on vacation I would like to ask us this question, "What do we have to do before we go on vacation?" The answer that I am looking for is that we need to prepare before we leave. There is packing; there is making sure you have your tickets; there is finding your passports so you can leave the country or better yet so you can return to your country; there is saving up spending money and there is surviving that exciting anticipation before you leave. So now let me ask us this question, "What do we have to do before we enter into the Lenten Season"? Well, are answer is a lot like the vacation Jan and I are planning to take. We need to prepare for Lent in the same manner that we would prepare for a vacation; by planning. What would you think if I told you that people in general don't look forward to Lent? They don't look forward to Lent because of previous memories of having to sacrifice or give up something for six weeks. I have to admit that before I understood what Lent was all about I was one of those people that didn't look forward to Lent. As I think back, what I remember most, is failing at whatever it was that I decided to give up. You see, I was one of those people who thought Lent was a time to be endured instead of being a time of grace and spiritual growth. Here is a thought for us to think about this morning "Have you ever thought about Lent as being a second chance to see if we are leading the life that God want us to lead?

How many of us are familiar with the term “mulligan.” It’s a term used in playing golf. You see when you hit the ball and it does not land where you wanted it to land, you would say you’re taking a mulligan and then you would take a second shot. So let’s think of Lent as a mulligan that is available to us once a year to re-direct where our lives have landed to be more inline with God’s purpose for us. Lets think of Lent as an event that will bring us closer and deeper into God’s grace and love for us. Let’s think of Lent as an opportunity for us to experience Lent as we have never experienced it before. Let’s think of Lent as a special time when we will receive God’s grace; a grace that will help guide us through our Lenten journey of self-reflection and change. Let’s think of Lent as a time that God is going to help transform our lives so we may feel a greater freedom, so we may feel a greater joy, and that we will feel a deeper love for Jesus in our lives. So how do we accomplish all of these “Lets think of Lent” thoughts? First off we need to open our hearts to God’s love and second we need to believe that we can really change from wherever we were or are in this life to where God wants us to be. For this year’s Lenten season let’s find in ourselves the same amount of anticipation and excitement that we may feel towards that “once in a lifetime vacation”. You know the kind of anticipation and excitement where you can’t get to sleep because of all fun and joy you’re going to have. So in the next few weeks, lets prepare and anticipate this Lenten season with excitement and joy as we pack our bags and buy our tickets to head out on our very own Lenten vacation. A vacation that allows us to experience God’s grace and love as we prepare for the miracle of Easter. So what about those of us who may find it difficult to recognize Jesus and open our hearts to Him? How are we going to become excited about the coming of Lent if we can’t find Jesus in our lives? What if we have or had a sinful past and don’t feel worthy of Jesus’ love? These questions bring to light several things that some of us may be thinking and feeling as we begin to attempt to prepare for Lent. First, there seems to be the notion where we think, we are totally responsible in finding the path or way to opening our hearts. Second, there seems to be a roadblock of un-forgiven sin that is keeping us from opening our hearts. So what can we do to overcome these obstacles that are preventing us from preparing for Lent? The answer to this question may surprise some of us because our answer is that we do nothing! You see as long as we feel responsible that we are to do what is needed, we are keeping God away from helping us. Have you ever heard the phrase, “Let Go, Let God? Why is it, as humans, we think that we can do God’s work for us? Could it be our stubborn resistance in giving up control of how we’re traveling down our life’s

journey? For our answer to these questions I would like for us to jump way ahead in our story of the Easter miracle. I would like for us to go to the part in our Easter story where Jesus has risen and is now returning to visit his disciples who fear He is no longer is alive. Some of you may be wondering why are we going so far ahead in our story of Easter to learn what we may need for us to prepare for Lent. Isn't Lent about celebrating the beginning of the Easter story? My goal for us this morning is for us to realize that what is needed most is that we have "hope". And with hope we are able to allow God to do the work that we keep trying to do for ourselves in opening our hearts to Him. I would like for us, this morning, to learn about two followers of Jesus, who had no hope, who were sad and who were disappointed about Jesus' death on the cross. The story of these two followers of Jesus is titled "The Road to Emmaus". We find this story in Luke, Chapter 24, verses 13-35 and it begins ***"That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a town named Emmaus. It is about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking about everything that had happened. While they were talking, discussing these things, Jesus himself came near and walked with them. (But the two men were not allowed to recognize Jesus.) He asked them, "What's this I hear you discussing with each other as you walk?" The two men stopped, their faces looking very sad. The one named Cleopas said, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has just happened there" Jesus said, "What are you talking about?" They said, "It's about Jesus, the one from Nazareth. To God and to all the people he was a great prophet. He said and did many powerful things. But our leaders and the leading priests handed him over to be judged and killed. They nailed him to a cross. We were hoping that he would be the one to free Israel. But then all this happened. "And now something else: It has been three days since he was killed, but today some of our women told us an amazing thing. Early this morning they went to the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid. But they did not find his body there. They came and told us they had seen some angels in a vision. The angels told them Jesus was alive! So some of our group went to the tomb too. It was just as the women said. They saw the tomb, but they did not see Jesus." Then Jesus said to the two men, "You are foolish and slow to realize what is true. You should believe everything the prophets said. The prophets said the Messiah must suffer these things before he begins his time of glory." Then he began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. He started with the books of Moses and then he talked about what the prophets had said about him. They came near the town of Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if he did***

not plan to stop there. But they wanted him to stay. They begged him, "Stay with us. It's almost night. There's hardly any daylight left." So he went in to stay with them. Joining them at the supper table, Jesus took some bread and gave thanks. Then he broke some off and gave it to them. Just then the men were allowed to recognize him. But when they saw who he was, he disappeared. They said to each other, "When he talked to us on the road, it felt like a fire burning in us. How exciting it was when he explained to us the true meaning of the Scriptures!" So the two men got up then and went back to Jerusalem. There they found the followers of Jesus meeting together. The eleven apostles and the people with them said, "The Lord really has risen from death! He appeared to Simon." Then the two men told what had happened on the road. They talked about how they recognized Jesus when he shared the bread with them.

How many of us are able to relate to these two followers of Jesus? How many of us are able to feel the emotions of not recognizing Jesus in our lives? ***And how many of us don't know how to even go about finding Jesus in the first place?*** Do you know what is interesting about this last question? It sounds a lot like a question that we raised earlier in our message, concerning our approach to Lenten Season. Remember the question, ***"How are we going to become excited about the coming of Lent if we can't find Jesus in our lives?"*** What these two questions have in common is the realization that we don't know how to recognize and find Jesus in our lives. In our story of the two followers of Jesus walking down the road, they did not even know how to recognize Jesus and He was walking right along side of them. I believe our story today offers us a big lesson to learn and that is that we do not have the ability to find Jesus because it is Jesus who finds us. It is Jesus who will open our eyes so we can see and recognize Him. What is important for us is that we are willing to allow Jesus to find us. And by doing so we are allowing our hearts to be available for the gift of God's grace and love to come into our lives. So as we prepare for the upcoming Lenten Season just relax and be available for God to bring to you what you will need to travel down your own personal road to Emmaus; a road that will allow your eyes and heart to open up to Jesus in your life. Amen