

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, April 30, 2017**

Rev. Andrew Reid

I Peter 1:17-23; Psalm 116; Luke 24:13-35

“God-moments on the road”

From Monday to Thursday of this week, I will be at Crieff Hills Conference Centre. Crieff Hills is the Presbyterian Church in Canada's retreat and conference centre just south of Guelph. That is why I warned the ladies of our Highland group, who are there this weekend, to be on their best behaviour, or I will hear all about it. I will be there to serve as a counsellor at a Guidance Conference.

Guidance Conference is one of several steps that candidates for ministry in our church must go through. A candidate must first be recommended as a suitable candidate for ministry by her or his home congregation, then be certified by the presbytery to which that congregation belongs. Then, after going through psychological evaluation, but before the end of their first year of theological studies, comes the Guidance Conference.

The Conference consists of three days of intense and intensive scrutiny by a group of counsellors. There are individual and group interviews, group activities and exercises, workshops, presentations, worship, and a little – just a little – free time. And at the end of the conference, each candidate receives a report with recommendations.

These can range from a recommendation that the candidate be recertified as a suitable candidate for ministry; that she or he be recertified with certain conditions; that she or he not be recertified until certain conditions have been met; or that she or he not be recertified.

As you may be able to see, Guidance Conference is an important step in the discernment process, and both candidates and counsellors take it very seriously. I have seen many sleepless nights, many struggles, many

tears, a lot of joy, and occasionally some disappointment, among candidates and counsellors alike.

I tell you that to tell you this. Guidance Conference always includes an opportunity for counsellors to share some of their experience in ministry and in their faith journey. One of things we will be asked to talk about is a God-moment that we have experienced, a moment when we have had a particularly deep, personal experience of God in our lives.

As you may imagine, these are very personal, almost intimate things to talk about, and every counsellor – as every person of faith – will have a different story to tell, and unique God-moment to share. I have shared some of my God-moments with you over the years that I have been here in New St James, so I am not going to talk about them again today. However, some of my most precious God-moments have come during my time here, so I may well talk about them as I get closer to my retirement date.

But what the Guidance Conference counsellors are asked to talk about is the kind of thing that Jesus' two disciples experienced as they made their weary way from Jerusalem home to Emmaus. It was the evening of the first day of the week, the evening of the first Easter day. The two, like the other disciples, had lived through the tumultuous events of the last few days, from triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to the last supper and the washing of their feet on Maundy Thursday, to Jesus' being betrayed, arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, and buried on Good Friday. Then that very day, the women in their group had come with stories of seeing Jesus alive. Some of the other disciples had checked it out and returned with the same story.

Surely it wasn't so. It couldn't be. Could it? The dead don't live again. They are dead, for goodness' sake. How can they be seen alive and well? It can't be true. Can it? And if it is, what can it all mean? And so they were *talking with each other about all these things that had happened* Luke

24:15. They were puzzled, confused, perplexed, unsure what to make of it all and what to believe.

And as they talked as they journeyed, a stranger came up and walked with them. They told him when he asked what was troubling them so. He responded by talking to them about what Moses, and the prophets of old, and Scripture said.

And later, when they looked back on that conversation, they realised that as he talked to them, their hearts had started to burn within them as he opened the Scriptures to them. They realised that his words had reached deep within them and touched some profound and important part of them, touched the heart of their very being as people of faith. In fact, his words touched them so deeply that even though they had just walked the 11 kilometres from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they got up and hurried right back to Jerusalem to tell the others what they had experienced.

It was a God-moment. A God-moment that they never expected, that crept up on them completely unawares. A God-moment that drew an immediate response, that transformed their faith, their understanding, their outlook on life. A God-moment that could never be repeated. It would remain – given the circumstances, it could only remain – a once in a lifetime experience.

God-moments. Sometimes they come to us in situations when we least expect them, and sometimes when all the indications are that they are about to come. Sometimes they come to us when we are surrounded by people and bustle and noise, and sometimes in moments of solitude and peace. Sometimes they come to us in places where they have come to many other people before, and sometimes in places where they have come to no-one else before. Sometimes they come to us in times of confusion, perplexity, pain or loss, and sometimes in moments of great joy, fulfilment, excitement or ecstasy. Sometimes they come to us in

moments of great clarity and insight as they come, and sometimes we only realise they have come to us when we look back and recollect them in tranquillity. Sometimes – and more and more often this is how I find I am experiencing them – they come in the gentle touch, or the kind word, or the selfless, generous action of some caring person who is not afraid to show that they care.

So let me ask you the obvious question: when have you experienced a God-moment?

And if your answer is that you have never experienced a God-moment, then let me rephrase the question: having heard what I have just said about God-moments, what moment, as you look back on it, may actually have been a God-moment, even though in the moment, you failed to recognize it as a God-moment?

But be careful: once we start to recognize the God-moments in our lives, we cannot turn a blind eye to them, or ignore them. The question then becomes: how will we respond?