

When Jesus Drops In Luke 24:13-35 | 4/30/2017

Many people might associate drones with clandestine operations against ISIS and other terrorist operations. But, in fact, drones can be, and are, utilized in many other ways, some of which are strictly humanitarian.

In Rwanda, rural medical clinics are so isolated that deliveries cannot be made by trucks or motorcycles. Storage facilities are inadequate for the blood that is required for emergency transfusions, especially during childbirth. So airplane-style drones now carry blood to these rural clinics. They save lives by airlifting blood to where it needs to be. Zipline International, based in San Francisco, has developed this innovative system of blood distribution. Zipline is creating a set of hubs that can reach every health clinic in Rwanda by a drone delivery flight of 45 minutes or less. Zipline believes that this kind of drone delivery system will become a normal part of health care in Rwanda and elsewhere. The company is totally focused on "serving health care systems," says Zipline's cofounder. "Every delivery you make is potentially saving a human life."

That's why Jesus might support what certain drones are doing today. They're dropping in out of nowhere performing miracles and healing people. Or, at least they make this possible. Obviously, Jesus knew nothing about drones. But he was *like* a drone in that he seemed to drop in from nowhere to work a miracle or heal somebody. Like Zipline, Jesus is totally focused on serving people in need. And after being raised from the dead, he travels the country and pops up in surprising places, with the range of an airplane-style drone.

On Easter morning, Jesus appears to Mary in the garden and says, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (John 20:15). On Easter afternoon, Jesus swoops in on two disciples who are walking the road to Emmaus, and interprets the Scriptures to them (v. 27). On Easter evening, he appears to his disciples and shows them his hands and his feet (v. 39). A week later, Jesus drops in on Thomas and the other disciples, appears to the disciples again on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias and cooks a fish breakfast for them (John 20, 21). The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus appears to more than 500 of his followers, then to James, then to all the apostles and finally to Paul himself -- on the road to Damascus (1 Corinthians 15, Acts 9).

Jesus goes all over the place, serving people and sharing the good news of his resurrection. He is not a drone, but he is drone-like in his ability to reach people everywhere.

So how does Jesus appear to us today, and what does he deliver? Okay, let's go back.

In the story of the walk to Emmaus, two disciples are in distress after the death of Jesus. They're talking about the recent events in Jerusalem and are as desperate for help as a patient in a rural health clinic in Rwanda. So Jesus drops in on them, not via a Zipline drone, of course, but in the form of a *stranger*. Luke tells us that "Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (vv. 15-16).

The two disciples tell the stranger about Jesus, "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (v. 19), condemned to death and crucified. They report that they were astounded by the women in their group who found the tomb of Jesus empty, and who were told by angels that Jesus was alive (v. 23). Heads spinning, the two disciples are not sure what to make of all this.

So what does Jesus deliver to them, in the form of a *stranger*? *Clarity about the Scriptures*. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures" (v. 27). He engages them in a small group Bible study, and helps them to see how Jesus fits into God's plan since the time of Moses.

Jesus continues to drop in on us today and offer us clarity about the Scriptures. Often, he comes in the form of a stranger, offering us new insights into what God is saying. Such a perspective is always helpful to us, because, if we study the Bible in isolation, we're going to continue to come to conclusions based on one point of view.

White Southern preachers in the 1860s used the Bible to defend slavery. They pointed to the Scriptures, which said, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling" (Ephesians 6:5) and "Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect" (Titus 2:9). These Southerners were Christians who wanted to preserve slavery, and they used the words of the Bible as justification for their position.

What they needed was a stranger to come to them and point out that what God really wanted was a world of equality, a world in which "there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). White Southern preachers would have been helped by a conversation with devout black believers and white abolitionists, who saw slavery as a sin and a defilement of New Testament values. Bible study is most valuable when it is done in community, with strangers as well as friends.

As the walk to Emmaus continues, Jesus drops in on the disciples in the form of a *guest*. Luke tells us that Jesus walks ahead of them as if he were going on, but they urge him to be their guest, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So Jesus accepts their invitation and goes in to stay with them (vv. 28-29).

So what does Jesus deliver to them in the form of a *guest*? *An opportunity to serve*. So often, when we find ourselves feeling desperate and distressed, the best way to experience a lift is to serve a person in need. This might mean offering a hot meal to a homeless person at a shelter, tutoring a struggling student or working on a house for Habitat for Humanity. *Prevention* magazine (February 4, 2013) reports that "people who volunteer are likelier to be happier than those who don't -- regardless of how much money they make. ... Researchers believe volunteering boosts happiness because it increases empathy."

Serving a person who is a guest or a stranger puts us in touch with the resurrected Jesus. "Come, you that are blessed by my Father," says Jesus at the final judgment. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:34-35, 40).

Finally, Jesus drops in on the disciples in the village of Emmaus in the form of a *host*. When Jesus is at the table with them, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them, the actions of a host. Then their eyes are opened and they recognize him. Jesus immediately vanishes from their sight, and they are left to say to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us ... while he was opening the Scriptures to us?" (vv. 30-32).

What does Jesus deliver in the form of a *host*? Himself! As a host, Jesus delivers the gift of himself. He revealed himself to the two disciples in the breaking of the bread, and he reveals himself to us in the very same way. When we gather at the Communion table, we are not gathering at a Lutheran table or an Episcopal table or a Presbyterian table. Instead, it is the Lord's table. Jesus is our host, offering us the gift of himself and promising to nourish us for lives of faithful discipleship. This is a gift that even more life-giving than a container of blood, delivered by drone to a remote African health clinic. It delivers eternal life.

Jesus made his first delivery to Emmaus, and he continues to drop in on us today. He comes as a *stranger*, interpreting the Scriptures to us. He arrives as a *guest*, giving us opportunities to serve. And he swoops in as a *host*, offering us the gift of himself in the breaking of the bread. Our challenge is to respond to these surprising deliveries in the same way that the disciples of Emmaus did -- by telling other people what has happened to us, and how Jesus has been made known to us. If we do this, the delivery of Jesus will be complete, and we might even help to save a life.

PASTOR KEITH

Children's Sermon

Play a game of hide-and-seek with the children. Tell them to hide in the congregation while you close your eyes and count to 10. After you open your eyes, go looking for them. After you find a few, invite all of them to come back, and compliment them on hiding so well. Then ask them if there is any place that they can hide from Jesus. Tell them the story of the two disciples who left Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and who were walking to the village of Emmaus. Ask them if they were able to get away from Jesus. No, they weren't. Tell the children that "Jesus himself came near and went with them" in the form of a stranger (vv. 15-16), and he told them about all the places that the Bible talked about Jesus (v. 27). Continue the story, saying that Jesus and the disciples stopped for dinner, and while they were eating, Jesus broke the bread and they recognized him (vv. 28-31). Ask the children if they ever feel that Jesus is close to them, and where they feel this most strongly. Let them know that Jesus is especially close to us when we're reading the Bible and eating together, and there's no place in the world that we can hide from him.