

## **A Walk to Emmaus**

Luke 24:13-32 (selected verses)

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Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney, First Presbyterian Church, San Rafael, CA

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"*

*They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, ... But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel...."*

*Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ..." Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.*

*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"*

I love hearing from you about the places you walk and hike. You probably have favorite places in Marin, and then there are those in Sonoma, on the coast, in the Sierras. Maybe you are not able to do the same walks or hikes that you have in the past, but the memory of being there has stayed with you.

I also love hearing about where you like to eat. Often Jeffrey and I will be talking at the end of the day and we will say – "So and so told me after worship about a great place to eat. Let's go there." I like to hear about places that have a good breakfast or lunch or dinner or brunch, variety or specialties. Sometimes we cannot eat like we used to, but memories of meals and meals shared can sustain us.

Eating and walking with others are central to our passage today and to the experience of resurrection.

## The Meal

The meal redefines the disciples' understanding of Jesus. Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread to them (Luke 24:30), the same sequence of actions we recall from his final meal (22:19). The pattern also recalls Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (9:16). Meals so characterize Jesus' ministry that Robert J. Karris concluded, "In Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal." Meals will shape Christian gatherings in Acts and on to today precisely because believers recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread (24:35).

## The Road

Today's passage offers a glimpse of Jesus and his disciples after that first Easter. The story begins with two of Jesus' followers on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. One is named Cleopas; the other is not named, and might be Cleopas' wife.

It is no accident that the first place the Risen Jesus shows up in the Gospel of Luke is on a road. Journeying is a prominent motif throughout Luke's two-volume work (the Gospel and Acts). Repeatedly, Jesus meets people along the road: the middle section of Luke's Gospel (the so-called "Travel Narrative") is structured around Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27); Acts says that the first self-designation for the newly-emergent movement of Jesus-followers was not "Christians," but "the Way" (*hodos*, Acts 9:2; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The Lukan focus on travel—both literal and figurative—serves as an apt metaphor for discipleship, following in Jesus' footsteps.

Rev. Bruce Epperly talks about how the Easter story is an embodied story that involves walking and a meal.

Easter is about embodied movement. Resurrection moved the cells as well as the soul of Jesus, and the cells and souls of his followers. Resurrection still gets us out of our comfort zones and calls us to the open road, spiritually, ethically, and physically.

He writes - I love to walk. Each morning, and virtually every day of the year, I walk from the church I pastor, South Congregational Church, in Centerville, MA, to the Craigville Conference Center, and back. This two mile walk takes me past a river, wetlands, and the Craigville beaches. I spend the walk observing the world around me and my own inner thoughts. I often use the time for intercessory prayer and personal centering, taking in God's energy of love and sharing it with others. In recognition of my love for walking, one of my friends has sent me a paperweight that proclaims, *solvitur ambulando*, "it will be solved in the walking."

A walk and a meal can transform your life, and that's what happened in the encounter of Jesus with two of his earliest followers. Trudging down the road, two utterly confused followers are joined by a third man. Their world has been turned upside down by the events of the past week: celebration, conflict, violence, and death, and now the possibility that their martyred

spiritual leader has come back to life. Resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion. It doesn't fit into any rational world view, including the theology of resurrection of the first century Jewish people. They could imagine a resurrection of all humanity at the end of history, but not the resurrection of a solitary individual.

But, they walk the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, first sharing their common grief, and then entering into a strange conversation with their unexpected companion, who unfolds the story of salvation through resurrection to them. Somehow, they cannot recognize their companion as the teacher and healer Jesus. Perhaps, it is a bit of divine mystical energy allowing them to gently adapt to a new way of seeing.

Confused and grief stricken, the two men nevertheless reach out to the stranger. They invite him to supper, and come to know his identity as the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Their hospitality leads to a theophany, an encounter with the Risen Jesus, who is known in the simple acts of praying and eating, same as the sacrament of communion.

Movement and meal lead to revelation, and then Jesus is gone, vanishing from their sight, but leaving them with warmed hearts, lively spirits, and energized bodies. They are so energized that they walk seven miles back to Jerusalem to share their good news that Jesus is risen and on the road.

After breaking the bread, Jesus vanished from their sight. He may have needed to be on the move as well. God is not static, imprisoned by yesterday's revelations and the church's creeds and scriptures. God is alive and on the move, doing new things and sharing new insights with other pilgrims on the journey.

Scholars really don't know where Emmaus is located. Several possibilities have been surfaced, but perhaps vagueness is a virtue. In not localizing Emmaus, we can open to the possibility that Emmaus is everywhere. Wherever we are on the road and at every mealtime, Jesus comes to us, filled with energy and possibility and the hope of resurrection.

### **But We Had Hoped**

This story is one of presence and hope, but I don't want to move through the season of Easter with only joyful trumpets and alleluias. When I think about this story of a shared walk and meal, I also think about the realities of the disciples. They were heartbroken. I am struck by that poignant phrase "But we had hoped....."

"But we had hoped ..." So much is said in those four words, as they speak of a future that is not to be, a dream that created energy and enthusiasm but did not materialize, a promise that created faith that proved to be false. It speaks of a future that is closed off, now irrelevant, dead.

“But we had hoped ...” Those words ring true. They are not the only truth, of course; there is much in this life that is beautiful, daring, confident, inspiring, and more, all of which deserves our gratitude. But there is also disappointment, heartbreak, regret, and failure.

Just as before there is resurrection, before there are burning hearts on the road to Emmaus, there are broken ones.

Part of being human is knowing our hearts break and we are heart broken. And it is to these heartbroken disciples in today’s reading that the Risen Christ comes, walking along with them and us on the road, astonished that we don’t see as we ought, teaching us the Scriptures that we may understand, sharing his presence through bread and wine, and offer deep love that causes their burning hearts and prompts them and us back into the world.

But all of that starts with broken hearts. The church is a place for broken hearts .....- to share disappointment that the cancer returned, to share the addiction wasn’t overcome yet, the loved one died, a relationship is still fractured, the job didn’t materialize, the family hurt instead of helped ... and so on and so on.

We can give space to grieve a future that will never be ... in order that we may possibly hear and receive the future God is creating and preparing. We can grieve together when we are heartbroken in our own lives and for the world. And we can encourage each other in the sturdy, enduring hope that together we can rest in the love and grace and justice and peace of Christ, with broken hearts and burning hearts as we walk and work together.

On this road

We are walking, moving along, wondering, asking questions, savoring, praying, reading, working for justice & peace, listening to joys and sorrows.

On this road

We are eating and breaking bread. We gather to break bread around this table, and in the chapel, and in Canoles Hall and the patio, and in homes as we bring meals to one another, at Supper Club gatherings, Tuesday nights with Street Chaplaincy, and more.

May we be open to moments when Christ opens our eyes and sets our hearts to burning.  
Amen.

Mary Beth Dinkler, “Emmaus Road,” Working Preacher, 4/11/21

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/emmaus>

Bruce Epperly, “Let’s Go For A Walk: Reflections On The Road To Emmaus” Patheos, 5/4/14

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2014/04/>

David Lose, “Broken Before Burning,” Working Preacher, 4/19/14

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/broken-before-burning>