

Rev. Eric Dillenbeck  
Luke 24: 13-35  
It's The Familiar Things  
April 23, 2023 – Rocky River Presbyterian Church

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, *“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”* They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>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?”* <sup>19</sup>He asked them, *“What things?”* They replied, *“The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”* <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, *“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”* <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. <sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, **he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.** <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?”* <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, *“The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!”* <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

### **“It’s The Familiar Things”**

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, the creators of our lectionary bring us another version of the stories of what happened on Easter morning – wanting us to see how Jesus’ followers are reacting to the news of his death and resurrection.

Today’s version from the Gospel of Luke finds us on the road from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus.

Even before I became active in the church I knew about this story. The Father of one of my high school friends used to tell me all about this Men's Retreat he went on every year that was called Emmaus Road. The men who gathered for the weekend were paired up and together they made the journey to the camp for a weekend of conversation and spiritual exploration designed to deepen their spiritual journeys. My friend's dad was so proud to tell me that this retreat brought together men from all walks of life – contractors, doctors, waiters, lawyers, truckers, and teachers... they brought all their doubts, questions, and lived experiences to the retreat and found Jesus present in their lives. While I have some issues with some of the tactics that were used during those retreats, the basic idea reflects what happened on that road to Emmaus so long ago.

Cleopas and another follower of Jesus needed space to think through what they have seen and heard about Jesus. They were leaving Jerusalem, walking to Emmaus – a community that the text tells us is 7 miles from the Holy City. I don't know about you, but I find that walking or traveling provides me the space to gain perspective – I can use the time to think through the events that are weighing on my mind and having someone to talk with is a gift.

Cleopas and his friend use this long walk to process their confusion following the death of the One in whom they had placed their hopes and dreams and the puzzlement they feel surrounding the claims of the women who went to the tomb that morning only to find it empty. Some faithful followers heard that news and immediately their hearts lit up with hope – they believed Jesus was raised. But many others, like Cleopas and his friend needed some time and space to worry over this in their hearts because the amazing grace of this new reality had not settled in the marrow of their souls yet.

So here they are – out there on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus discussing everything – holding up what they know and looking at it from every angle – trying to make sense of it – when a stranger begins to shadow their walk – to walk on the edge of their conversation – just close enough to hear what they are saying – not too close to make them stop talking. The text tells us this stranger was Jesus, but “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” I have not seen a great explanation of what this part of the story means...did Jesus keep them from recognizing him? If so, why?

I spent the week thinking about that phrase – “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” I wonder if their own issues, not Jesus, was the cause of their limited understanding. Was their own doubt, their own grief, their own questions and fear what kept them from recognizing Jesus walking with them?

How many times have I not sensed the presence of God with me when I have been sad, when I was grieving, when I was scared, when I was too busy? When did I not recognize Jesus' healing presence in the people who gathered around me? How often has that happened to you?

“What are y'all talking about?” asks Jesus. His question snaps the guys to attention – they are suddenly aware of this stranger's presence and their sadness stops them in their tracks (v 17b). Astonished that this man has not heard about the events in Jerusalem, they resume their walk – this time as a trio as these disciples recount the story of Jesus.

As they get to the end of their story – with the news that Jesus’ tomb was empty and the angels had said he was alive once again – Jesus interrupts them!

*“HELLO!”*

*“What is it going to take for you to understand all that Jesus taught and how it underlined what the Prophets have already said.”*

Luke does not point to specific passages Jesus used to help these disciples understand the bigger point of his life, death, and resurrection. There are too many different examples that could have been used. On this topic, one biblical scholar says, “The pattern of life emerging from death is, in fact, a fundamental pattern of the entire biblical saga<sup>1</sup>.”

They have walked with this man for quite a few miles at this point, and they STILL do not recognize Jesus. But evening is approaching and their intrinsic understanding of hospitality and their eagerness to keep talking leads them to invite him to stay with them and enjoy a meal after a long journey.

It is at this point – during the meal that they begin to recognize Jesus.

After he has taken bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them – their eyes were opened.

“Meals are a hallmark of Luke's narrative, and he concludes this account in the same way. These meals evoke the longed for gathering of Israel and express the inclusive spirit of Jesus 's own mission. Full revelation of who Jesus is and what his death and resurrection mean comes at the meal. Jesus’ words and gestures are the same as at the feeding of the 5000 and reminiscent of the final Passover meal<sup>2</sup>” which had taken place just a few short days ago.

I think it is important to notice that recognition didn’t happen because of the teaching on the journey, they didn’t recognize him because of a miracle. It wasn’t his radiant smile or winning personality.

It was the small, familiar things - the breaking of the bread, the blessing and sharing of the meal that helped them recognize Jesus.

These disciples heard the stories of the empty tomb and the encounter with the angels who said Jesus was alive; they had walked with Jesus and listened to him once again teach them about God’s designs for relationship with creation, but they could not recognize the Good News of the resurrection by themselves.

One biblical scholar notes that the good news of resurrection makes no difference until it comes into our everyday lives writing: “...Easter is no genuine celebration unless it touches the private wounds and the tragedies near at hand. Easter is not truly good news until it gets personal – until it gets down to the local issues. When all is said and done, this is a story about how the truth of Easter belongs not only on the front page of the newspaper but also on the back page, nestled among the items of neighborhood news. This is a story of how the cosmic truth of

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Senior, *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 2 Lent Through Eastertide. Exegetical Perspective* pg. 421

<sup>2</sup> Donald Senior, *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 2 Lent Through Eastertide. Exegetical Perspective* pg. 423

Christ's resurrection comes home as a local issue<sup>3</sup> and is experienced in the familiar things of daily living.

One of my preaching professors said, "When you are crawling your way through the pit of despair, Jesus may show up as a friend, who gets down on her hands and knees and quietly crawls with you. When you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus may show up as a man at the bank, who takes your hand and leads you through the awful red tape of wills, insurance claims, and safety deposit boxes. When you are new in town, dreading that first day of middle school, Jesus may show up as the boy whose locker is next to yours, who says, 'Hey, want to eat lunch together today?'"<sup>4</sup>

My friend's dad was so proud of his Emmaus Road retreat that helped so many men experience the presence of Christ in their lives – good for him. My hope, my friends, as we go forth this day, is that you remember that you bear the good news of Easter in your every action, helping others to experience the truth of God's love for them in the small familiar things that you do every day. There are so many people whose eyes are kept from seeing Christ in their lives because of realities that we don't fully understand.

How do you treat the homeless, how do you greet the stranger, how do you comfort the grieving or brighten the day of those experiencing despair? How do you come alongside your neighbors, friends, and family members in those everyday moments of life so they experience the presence of the Living Christ at work in their lives?

Christ is Risen. Alleluia.

Let's be about the work of sharing this good news.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>Tom Long, *Whispering the Lyrics*, "Getting Down to the Local Issues," p. 97.

<sup>4</sup>Anna Carter Florence, *Lectionary Homiletics*, April-May, 2008, p. 8.