

# “Open Your Eyes”

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher<sup>1</sup>  
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio  
April 17, 2022—Easter

## Luke 24:13-35 (Common English Bible)

<sup>13</sup> On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. <sup>16</sup> They were prevented from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup> He said to them, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” They stopped, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> The one named Cleopas replied, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?” <sup>19</sup> He said to them, “What things?” They said to him, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. <sup>20</sup> But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. <sup>21</sup> We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. <sup>22</sup> But there’s more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> and didn’t find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. <sup>24</sup> Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn’t see him.” <sup>25</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. <sup>26</sup> Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup> Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. <sup>28</sup> When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him, saying, “Stay with us. It’s nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?” <sup>33</sup> They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup> They were saying to each other, “The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup> Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

My wife Mary and I met early in our freshman year at Wooster. I don’t remember a particular time when I met her. Actually, I was dating a girl who lived on the same hall in her dormitory, and I might have seen her there. Where I do remember first talking with her was at weekly choir rehearsal. One of my jobs on campus at Wooster was as Manager of the Concert Choir. Mostly, being “manager” meant setting up the chairs in the rehearsal hall each Tuesday evening. I would be there early, of course. After my set-up was completed I would stand around and greet the other students and townspeople who sang in the big choir. I remember flirting with Mary and some of her friends in the soprano section – that became pretty much a weekly occurrence. I would see her occasionally in the dining hall or in passing in her dormitory, but that was it. That was the extent of our relationship for nearly two years.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my sermon from April 11, 2004 entitled “Their Eyes Were Opened”

Toward the end of our sophomore year we were in the College's production of "West Side Story" – I was on stage as an actor, and she played lead clarinet in the pit orchestra. During breaks in rehearsal I used to flirt with her: I would hang over the edge of the stage and chat her up a bit. She thought I was weird.

It was just a day or two before the show opened, and a dress rehearsal had just finished. I was leaving the theater when I saw her standing alone in the lobby, looking out at the pouring rain. I had an umbrella; she didn't. I offered to walk her back to her dorm. She looked at my green eye shadow (I hadn't taken off my stage make-up yet), and decided that being seen with a weirdo was better than getting soaked to the skin.

Back at her dorm we sat for hours, talking. And it was during that long evening of conversation and sharing – after having known her casually for nearly two years, after having spoken with her almost weekly about inconsequential things – it was that night that my eyes were opened and I saw her as so much more than a pleasant and attractive young woman and talented musician. My eyes were opened to see someone who could accept me for who I was, encourage me in my growth, and love me. With my eyes opened I saw someone who I could love for the rest of my life.

Our long conversation that evening after play practice was, for me, an eye-opening experience.

Luke the gospel writer described an equally startling, eye-opening experience.

Luke's story of Jesus appearing on the road to Emmaus is one of my favorite stories because it captures a common experience – we look at something or someone without recognizing it for what it is. Luke said that there were two people walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. I think those two people were probably husband and wife. Why do I think so? First, Luke said that one of them was named Cleopas, but the second person is not named. In Bible times it was common to give the names of men but ignore the names of women. And second, the two live in the same house in Emmaus. So let's say that it was "Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas" who didn't recognize Jesus when he joined them on the road. That whole time they walked and talked with him on the road to their home in Emmaus they didn't recognize him because – let's be honest – they weren't expecting to see Jesus.

Sure, on many occasions Jesus had uttered cryptic statements about his dying but rising again in three days. But really – how could someone be raised from death to life? Death always wins in the end – everyone knows that. Jesus had been an inspiring teacher, seemingly a miracle worker in his day, but even he wouldn't be able to hold off the power of death inflicted by misguided leaders of church and state... or so everyone thought. The last person Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas expected to see as they walked back home was their teacher Jesus.

But they extended common hospitality to their traveling partner, inviting him to spend the night in their home. They asked their guest to offer the table blessing at the evening meal. They saw him break bread and give it to them... and something clicked in their minds... and he immediately vanished from their presence!

Let's flash back to those first hours after the crucifixion and burial. The believers in Jerusalem – the apostles and many others who had followed Jesus – had huddled together for consolation and protection behind closed doors, fearing that the authorities might come after them next! (Their plight makes us think of civilians in Ukraine huddling in basements and tunnels in fear of the violence being rained down upon them.) In those tense, sad, frightening hours after Jesus was crucified, the remaining eleven apostles undoubtedly told the others about their experience in the Upper Room at their Last Supper with Jesus on that night when the now-departed Judas had betrayed him. The apostles told the others about Jesus breaking bread, giving it to them with the words, "This is my body. Whenever you eat this bread, remember me."

So, on that Sunday night in the Cleopas home in Emmaus when Jesus had broken bread and offered it to them, suddenly they recalled what the apostles had told them. They looked at the familiar stranger and realized they knew him – it was Jesus! They "recognized" him – literally, the word "recognized" means "to know again." They opened their eyes, saw what was already before them, and knew him again!

Easter is a call for each one of you to hear the familiar story and to know Jesus again. This is true for you, the youthful churchgoer with a spot of chocolate already on your chin, and for you, the contented senior smiling at memories of many Easters-gone-by. This day recalling the Resurrection calls you to open your eyes to truth that you have heard before but haven't really embraced. Luke the gospel writer is hoping that you won't make the same mistake that Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas made, when they didn't recognize Jesus because they didn't really expect to encounter him.

Expect to see Jesus in your life and you will. Open your eyes to the resurrected Christ alive among us. When you look for the Risen Christ in your midst, you will recognize the love of Jesus in the way others show kindness and mercy toward you. When you recognize the Risen Christ living within you, you'll find yourself showing unconditional love and unexpected forgiveness toward others. When you open your eyes you recognize what was there all along: God's love for you, in the person of Jesus. Open your eyes and see how God has already forgiven you and showered you with love.

Some years ago a college student came by his pastor's office to discuss theological issues. Eventually the conversation came around to the subject of Easter. "What do you think of the resurrection?" the young man asked.

The pastor replied, "I believe that it happened in reality and not just in the minds of [people]."

"What is your evidence?" he asked.

"The apostles and followers of Jesus," the pastor replied. "Twelve men [and countless others] are not going to give up their lives to simply perpetuate that which they know to be a hoax."

"I don't know," the student mumbled, "I just don't know." And there was his problem. He was seeking knowledge, not faith. You do not say, "Resurrected Christ, appear to me and then I will believe." It is just the opposite. The resurrected Christ appeared only to those who did believe.<sup>2</sup>

Let today be the day that we stepped beyond the pretty, pretend world of Easter as it's presented by greeting cards and candy stores and restaurant brunch buffets! Let today be the day that we open our eyes, the day that we recognize Jesus as God's son raised from the grave to a new and eternal life, the day that we dedicate our lives to serving God by sharing Christ-like mercy and love.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

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<sup>2</sup> adapted from Brett Blair and Staff, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com) Sermons, ChristianGlobe Network, 2003