

Along the Road
Luke 24:13-35

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Today the story of the first Easter continues. We find two disciples on that Sunday afternoon, walking home to Emmaus, a community about 7 miles from Jerusalem. These two, one named Cleopas, may be husband and wife, or maybe they are just friends and fellow residents of Emmaus who left home to follow Jesus. They are ordinary disciples, not part of the Twelve, who are heading home and there will try to forget the disappointment of what happened in Jerusalem over the last four days. As they walked along this road to Emmaus, they talked about all that had happened. They even talked about the women who had seen the tomb open and empty and angels sitting where Jesus lay. Along the road, a stranger joined them. He walked and talked and eventually ate with them. They didn't know it was Jesus. They didn't know it was their risen Lord until the very end.

In a sense we are always traveling, Thomas Merton wrote, walking along the road toward home. We believe the presence of the risen Lord is with us. But we can't see that it is him. We often don't discern that he is with us as he promised. How do we know? How can we feel Him? How do we recognize him?

We sense the presence of our risen Lord when we talk to him. I love how Jesus got into conversation with these two. "What are you talking about?" he asks them. "Are you the only one who doesn't know what happened in Jerusalem these last three days?" they answer back. And so they pour out their whole story to him. That is prayer: pouring out our stories before God; Telling God what has happened in our lives. Of course God already knows, being God, but in the telling and the listening a relationship is formed. "Prayer is like having a date with God," says author Thomas Keating. "Regular periods of prayer let us get acquainted with Christ and God, not unlike the way we might phone someone who has impressed us or attracted us to their goodness. It's the same way in forming a relationship with God. We have to hang out together." For the monastic, hanging out with God is a way of life. For the rest, busy with babies and bosses, spouses and parents, God is content with a brief date - he asks only that it be a standing one.¹

In your bulletin today you will find a prayer covenant. My strong belief is that revival and renewal in the church starts with a commitment to prayer. Will you take 10 minutes a day to pray for the future our church?

Our officers have committed to this. The covenant is for you to keep as a reminder. I would love to know if you have made this commitment, so send me a letter or email and let me know. As you travel along the road, talk to the Lord – talk to Him about the things going on here. If you do, you will know his presence.

We know the presence of our risen Lord in the sharing of Scripture. Along that road, Jesus explained the Scriptures to them. Scripture is a powerful vehicle for revealing Jesus to us. It guides and strengthens those who know him. It has the potential to convert those who do not yet believe.

One of my friends in Texas had a daughter who rejected Jesus in her late teens in spite of being raised in the church. She belonged to a book club in college, and her father suggested they read the Bible as literature, tear it up if they wanted to, point out the inconsistencies, prove its irrelevance to today. His daughter was delighted at those prospects, so she convinced her club to do it. Nine months later, they were still reading the Bible and four young women, including his daughter, had become Christians.

These two disciples along the road to Emmaus reported that their hearts were burning with them while Jesus opened up the Scriptures to them. Scripture is a powerful thing: sharp as a two-edged sword, Paul writes, because it reveals the risen Jesus. As you travel along the road of life, read the Scriptures, and they will make known to you the presence of the risen Christ.

We know the presence of our risen Lord around the table of fellowship. Jesus somehow becomes the host of every meal he attends. He follows the same ritual every time in the gospels. He gives thanks, he breaks bread, and he gives it to his disciples. The gospels and the book of Acts are full of shared meals. Sharing a meal must be important not only for physical sustenance, but for spiritual sustenance as well.

The simple act of sitting down around a table is something a lot of people don't find particularly important today. American families are doing it less and less. Americans opt for fast food and eat on the run now. Americans spend \$376.25 per capita on fast food. Italians, in contrast, spend only \$8.61 a person.ⁱⁱ We can learn something from the Italians.

For Christians, the shared supper is a vital aspect of spiritual life. When these two disciples knew for sure that this was Jesus with them is when they sat down to eat together. Jesus still visits at mealtimes, remaining the host of every meal. Christ is found in our companions, the ones with whom we break bread. That's what the word companion literally means: with bread. "It is in saying the blessing and breaking bread with one another

that a meal with Jesus is celebrated and his resurrection presence is experienced.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in his book Life Together, "The Scriptures speak of three kinds of table fellowship that Jesus keeps with his own: daily fellowship at table, the table fellowship of the Lord's Supper, and the final table fellowship in the kingdom of God. But in all three, the one thing that counts is that 'their eyes were opened, and they knew him.'" Along the road of life, if we will sit down and eat together, and answer the invitation to sit down at this communion table, Christ's own table, then we will experience the presence of Jesus eating with us.

We know the presence of our risen Lord in the stranger, especially the stranger in need. Tony Campolo tells the story of the pastor of a large inner-city congregation who held a soup kitchen in their basement to feed the many homeless wandering around the city. Over time, these people from the soup kitchen began to wander into the 11:00 worship service on Sunday morning. The upper middle class folks who worshiped at that time felt uncomfortable with such lower class, poorly dressed visitors. Eventually one of the church leaders took the pastor aside and asked him, "Do these people have to be here with us? Can't we provide a special service just for them?" The pastor answered, "Well I think everybody should have a chance to meet Jesus face to face." "Of course," said the deacon, "everybody should have the chance to meet Jesus. I think they should have the same opportunities to meet Jesus face to face as we all do." The pastor shot back, "I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about you!" The pastor made it clear that what his church really needed was to encounter Jesus in the homeless who wandered into their church day after day, just looking for daily bread.^{iv}

What if these disciples along the road to Emmaus had not taken in this stranger and showed hospitality to him? They would not have had an audience with the risen Lord. We never know what blessings we might receive by giving hospitality or what we might lose by not welcoming those who are strangers to us, those in need, those who need the food, physical and spiritual, that we have to offer. "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers," the book of Hebrews exhorts us (13:2), "for by doing so some have entertained angels unaware." Along the road, be hospitable to all, and you will experience the presence of the risen Christ.

"The earliest reference to the Resurrection is Saint Paul's, and he makes no mention of an empty tomb at all. But the fact of the matter is, that in a way, it hardly matters how the body of Jesus came to be missing because in the last analysis, what convinced the people that he had risen

from the dead was not the absence of his corpse but his living presence.”^v
And so it has been ever since – with Mary, with the twelve, with the two on the road to Emmaus and with us.

O my friends, we do not serve a God far removed from us. Jesus walks along the road with us. It’s a long and winding road, full of joys and sorrows, successes and failures, health and illness, times when we are sure and times when we doubt. Can we see him? Can we feel him? He’s right here. Reach out and grab his hand. If you have trouble seeing and feeling Christ’s presence try what Cleopas and his companion did. Talk to him. Open the Scriptures. Join other disciples around the table. Minister to the stranger in need. Before we know it, we will recognize him again and know we are not alone. We have a companion along the road. Thanks be to God!

ⁱ Lynda McDaniel, "Hanging out with God," Beliefnet.com

ⁱⁱ HomileticsOnline, Luke 24:13-35, 4/18/99

ⁱⁱⁱ HomileticsOnline, Luke 24:13-35, 4/18/99

^{iv} Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, p. 28.

^v Frederick Buechner, *The Faces Of Jesus*, 219-20.