

Luke 24:13-36

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

"So Many Roads, and Just One Christ"

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April 18, 2021

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I find that in thinking about the possibility of resurrection in our lives, I also am thinking about the ways in which our faith is visible externally. There is something remarkable about lives of Christian faith and witness that is attractive and recognizable even when we don't name it, particularly. It was in remembering different individuals whose faith has inspired me that I remembered two illustrations while writing this week. About the first I almost want to offer an apology. I had a pastor in Connecticut who opened every sermon with a joke, likely one pulled off the internet. When I later began seminary, I swore to myself that I would never do that, or at least not habitually. So, for the part of this true story that sounds like a joke, I am a bit apologetic.

I always loved going to the Hannaford supermarket in Gardner, MA, because there were several cashiers who took particular delight in my very young daughters. If I dared to show up without them, they would ask about them with a kind of fond suspicion. It wasn't only me and my family in whom they took real interest, though. I had forgotten all of this until unpacking boxes in the past several weeks, when I discovered a scribbled note to remind me of this occurrence: Waiting behind just one gentleman, the cashier, Judy, greeted him with, "Bob, how are you? It's been a long time!" "Thing is," he said, "I've lost my wife." Judy was clearly deeply saddened, and she responded, "Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't know.!" "Oh, she didn't die . . . I lost her here in the store. If she had died, she'd be easier to find." Oh dear . . .

I have a sense that the experience of the disciples must have felt like some kind of cosmic joke. Maybe it was as if they were on the receiving end of the punch line: we have lost our friend. They know this to be true, because they saw his crucifixion and they heard about his death. Then, they hear about his resurrection, but it is pretty unbelievable. The men walking to Emmaus could have been anyone. We only know the name of Cleopas, and though people speculate about who the other might be—Luke himself, or maybe even Cleopas' wife, it really could be anyone. It could have been anyone who had been through what these two people had in the past weeks. Clearly from the way the story turns out, they are those who loved Jesus and whom Jesus knew. Still, there are a lot of people whose faces would have been downcast to recount the story of their friend and teacher's death.

And while they are unaware for most of the time they spend walking with Jesus that it is he, there is a telling moment for them, in the breaking of the bread—the sharing of a meal—that their eyes are opened. Only then do they acknowledge what they had been feeling all along. Their hearts burned as Jesus spoke with them earlier in the day, repeating scripture and explaining the significance of the prophetic words about himself. They knew without knowing somehow, that the stranger who walked with them was indeed their Lord.

Don't you wish sometimes that you could know Jesus was walking beside you as you make your way through this life? Let me restate the obvious, I guess: Don't you wish that you always had Jesus right beside you as you make your way through? Do you wonder if it was only on the road to Emmaus, and to two people that Jesus was somehow hidden from the view of eyes, even when hearts know his presence?

I'm reminded of the scene in *Hook*, the retelling of the Peter Pan story, when one of the Lost Boys looks hard at Robin Williams' face, pulls and twists the loose skin on his aging face, and then, in looking at his eyes and stretching tight his smile, sees his friend and recognizes him. If you haven't seen the movie, it's hard to know just how moving it is, in the thick of Robin Williams' identity crisis and the climax of the movie, to have such a firm sense of recognition come forward. The young boys' faith in him is reborn, in a sense, and they can move forward to vanquishing the dreadful Captain Hook.

Sometimes, though, it's so very hard to see Jesus. Have you seen Jesus lately? Maybe a better question to start with is whether you have known some of the emotions the disciples were walking through at the time. It's a simple statement of fact that we will face moments of despair or despondency. We will suffer the loss of family and friends we love; we will feel betrayed by employers or co-workers, or even our closest friends. Have you known Jesus' presence with you in those times? Were you able to recognize him as he walked beside you?

I am supposing now that we all have, at one time or another, or we would not be here. Or, if we have not had that ultimate sense of God's presence with us, we were raised by a family who told us about it, and encouraged us to come to church

and to worship such a God as this. I have known Jesus in this way. I have looked up to see Jesus' face in my darkest moments, and no, he didn't look like a first-century person of Middle Eastern descent.

He looked like Mrs. Rebovitch, who sat in our living room after my father died, not saying a word, but having delivered a casserole and then simply being there. He looked like my friend Jorn Jorns, who took my hand while we worshipped together in France, not long after I had lost my best friend. He prayed with me, and when we would walk together, he told me about his church at home in Stuttgart.

Jesus looked like Mrs. Krauss, who taught my third grade Sunday School class, and helped me mold clay into the shape of a cross. Jesus looked like one of my father's friends who walked with me through New York City as we talked about a possible job for me in mission work, following the end of my very brief corporate career. Jesus looked like my cousin who continually urged me toward independent school teaching, because he saw in me a teacher. Jesus look like the interim pastor in Gardner, who helped me know my way into seminary. Sometimes, when life presents especially difficult moments, it can especially difficult to see Jesus. I thought of this two weeks ago, when I hooked up my Spectrum t.v. and that evening watched a movie whose title I recognized.

Matthew McConaughey plays a young, inexperienced defense attorney in Mississippi, where a man is on trial for having killed the two men who raped and brutally beat his daughter. The story is largely about the issue of justice, and is a close regard for the inequities in a system that favors White people over Black, particularly in the racially charged South of the U.S. Nearing the end of the film, with all signs pointing to acquittal for the two White men, Matthew McConaghey bring his defense to an end by asking the jury to close their eyes. He walks them through a series of images in which he asks that they picture, deeply, a young girl who is so viciously attacked. In disturbing detail, he invites their most frightening, most emotional responses. Finally, as he asks that they understand what would motivate a father to act in passion to kill the men who had done these things to his daughter, he says, "now imagine this little girl is White."

In the Hollywood ending of this movie, justice is served, and the two families, Black and White, move forward together as friends. In the charged moment in which we live, with more than one court case involving justice seen as parsed between issues of race, I wonder where it is that we see Jesus. In whom are we able to recognize the healing hand of our Lord and also the wounded who needs our healing—and is our Lord. How often in our own reckoning do we see Jesus as a person of color? To what and to whom do we offer our love? I wonder when and where we look for Jesus as we walk.

There are a lot of walks we take in this wonderful life of ours. Not many of them lead to Emmaus. It strikes me this week in reading this story of the growing faith of the disciples that the glory of the resurrection could have stopped right there. They could have kept their meal to themselves, and so never have recognized Jesus in their midst. But they share; they share with a stranger who showed up next to them in the midst of their grief and anguish, and they invite him into their lives.

They could have kept to themselves the amazing and lifegiving news that Jesus Christ is not dead, but is alive again, and *we* would never know that Jesus continues to live and move among us even now, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Can you see Him now?

And we have a choice today, as well. We can keep to ourselves the truth of our faith, and Jesus can head back into the tomb, as dead as if he had never been resurrected in the first place. Because you see . . . our witness is as important as the disciples' was. We can keep silent, and in so doing roll the stone right back over the good news. Or, we can share our excitement about a Risen Christ, who walks with us and redeems us every day. We can share our enthusiasm for a Risen Christ who challenges us to live into our best selves, which includes speaking up for those who have no voice and working as hard as we can to resolve injustices. Sometimes our witness means naming our action as connected to our faith.

Witnessing can be a scary idea, particularly if we've been on the receiving end of someone else's uncomfortable witnessing. Still, how else are other people going to meet Jesus in the road today? Sometimes, our witnessing is quiet, and is on the level of our actions—sometimes the very best way to show what we believe.

Still, we can also name aloud how we see and know Jesus in various places at various times—being upheld, feeling comforted or guided. For other people who are longing to know that same sense of Christ’s walking with them, they might just need to hear about it. Are you still squirming a little bit to think about what you would ever say to someone about why your faith matters to you? You might say, “Black lives matter to me because my faith matters to me, and people of color are my neighbors”. You might say that justice for individuals matters to me because Jesus, our advocate, asks that we work toward justice for all. Sometimes, witnessing to our faith can also look very simple, with some ideas best practiced after the pandemic. They might look like this:

What are you doing for lunch today? Can I join you?

If you don’t have plans for Sunday morning, I’d love it if you’d come with me to my church. I think you’d really enjoy the fellowship there.

You have such a nice voice! You should come sing in our church choir. They’re always looking for new people. You can’t sing? No problem! You can join our chime choir. I think you’d also like to see what we do in the community and elsewhere to help other people.

What are you doing on Monday afternoons? Would you like to work with the Simmering Pot to provide a healthy meal in community? Or maybe you’d like to volunteer at the Tree of Life food pantry; it started with our church.

Are you doing o.k. lately? I know your hours were cut back. Would you like me to *take you* to the Tree of Life? You can get some help there to tide you over.

There are a lot of walks through this life of ours. And there is just one Jesus, but we are his disciples. We walk with him, and we have shared in the breaking of the bread in which we, too, recognize him. How are we going to help him to be present in this world, alive today not only in Spirit, but also in the palpable way of meeting physical needs? Then, how can we make invitation into a life of faith so that we also meet spiritual needs; so that we share the good news of the presence of God? May we be strengthened for the task. Amen.