

## Opened Eyes and Burning Hearts

Luke 24:13-35

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### **On the Road to Emmaus**

<sup>1</sup>Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles<sup>[a]</sup> from Jerusalem. <sup>1</sup>They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>1</sup>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?” “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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

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

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 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.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 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?”

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

## **Introduction**

It’s good to be back in worship with everyone after my trip to Bethlehem. I preached at both services at Central Moravian, and it was good to see many long-term friends. I used to call people “old” friends, but folks are a little sensitive about being called old. I had a full schedule of meetings at the seminary, the Institute of Moravian History and World Heritage, and Historic Bethlehem. I got to do a tour of the Brothers’ House attics and climbed up to the widow’s walk on the roof. I was glad that the weather was mild that day.

## **The Eleven and the Others**

One of the many interesting things in this little passage of Scripture is that it talks about the Eleven instead of the Twelve Disciples. This is because the disciple Judas had killed himself after betraying Jesus. The Book of Acts, which was also written by Luke, opens with a story about the choosing of a Twelfth disciple because the Twelve were symbolic of the twelve sons of Jacob who were the fathers of the Twelve tribes of Israel. But Luke’s gospel makes it clear that there were more than eleven disciples who continued to meet after the crucifixion.

Every gospel notes that it was women who first went to the tomb early on Sunday morning and found that Jesus wasn’t there. According to Luke, angels told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead, but they could hardly

believe it. Confused and excited, they ran to tell the Eleven the surprising news, but, as Luke tells us, the male disciples dismissed the women's story as an idle tale. One thing that the "MeToo" movement a few years ago made clear is that men too often dismiss what women say as idle tales.

## **Cleopas**

According to Luke's gospel there were also several male disciples who were not part of the Eleven. Some of those additional disciples may have traveled with the Eleven from Galilee to Jerusalem, but some probably joined Jesus' entourage in Jerusalem.

Our lesson for today is about two disciples who were not among the eleven. Luke only tells us the name of one of them, Cleopas, who is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Ancient tradition claims that the other disciple was Luke himself, but there is no evidence of that. We know almost nothing about them other than the fact that they were followers of Jesus and were walking to Emmaus, which was a small village a few miles from Jerusalem. Most likely, the Cleopas and his companion lived in Emmaus.

My hunch is that the reason Cleopas and his friend were not with the Eleven was because they had given up hope in the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed was at hand. Since Jesus was dead, they left Jerusalem as soon as the sabbath was over. They were trudging back to their homes in Emmaus to pick up the tangled threads of their old life. Jesus had briefly disrupted their world with visions of forgiveness, mercy, and peace. Now they had to go back to the world where the lame don't walk and the blind can't see. Cleopas and his friend were walking like zombies, stumbling home with crushed spirits and broken hearts.

I suspect that Luke intentionally did not identify the second person so that everyone who has heard this story through the ages can put themselves in that position. We are the unnamed disciple who struggle with the news of Jesus' resurrection. The disciples of Jesus did not have to be famous leaders or sages or heroes. Like Cleopas and his friend, we don't have the answers to

all the questions about God. We try to follow Jesus as best we can even, but would we recognize him today. With all the false Messiahs with their weapons of mass destruction and golden idols, would we recognize Jesus if he was walking beside on the sidewalk?

### **Did not recognize Jesus**

You may remember the popular song by Joan Osborne 30 years ago that asked “what if God were one of us – just a stranger on a bus.” It caused some controversy at the time, but that is almost exactly what is happening in this story. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had risen from the grave, and even some of his disciples did not recognize him because he was just like one of us. He was just a stranger walking on the road to Emmaus. And they did not know who he was.

Many people through the ages have assumed there were supernatural forces at work in this lack of recognition since Luke says they “were kept from recognizing him.” Some people think that Jesus somehow clouded the disciples perception so he could remain incognito. We get this kind of thing distortion field in science fiction a lot – like the Jedi mind trick in Star Wars. This is not the messiah you are looking for. I think there is more to this story than that.

### **Out of context?**

Some of you can attest to the fact that I do not always recognize people I know. It’s not just their names I forget. When I was in Bethlehem last week, I saw people I have known for over a decade, but I did not recognize them until they spoke to me. It is also hard to recognize people when you see them out of context. I ran into a church member at a sandwich shop a while back and she did not recognize me in a T-shirt and jeans. Maybe that’s what happened to Cleopas and his friend.

It could also be that grief and depression kept them from recognizing Jesus. Even though the women had reported that Jesus’ tomb was empty, Cleopas and his friend didn’t believe it. They couldn’t believe it. It was too fantastical.

They knew Jesus was dead. For two days and sleepless nights, they had been struggling to make sense of Jesus' death. How could the Messiah have been arrested and executed with common criminals? How could a Prophet who was mighty in word and deed have been scourged and humiliated? What were they supposed to do now that the Messiah was dead.

### **Meeting Jesus**

Amid their confusion, grief, and fear they met a stranger on the road. He asked them what was wrong and they poured out their hearts to him. They told him what had happened in the past week. That a great prophet named Jesus had been betrayed, tried, abused, and executed. They even told him about the women's report that the tomb was empty, but no one had seen Jesus. Everything they said to the stranger was in the past tense. Jesus **was** a prophet who **had been** handed over to the authorities. He **had been** executed. They **had thought** that he would redeem Israel. Each phrase spoke of their shattered hopes and broken lives.

### **Scripture**

Rather than being sympathetic, the stranger told them they were foolish not to believe the women. They weren't bad or faithful, but they were foolish to lose hope so soon. Then the stranger, like a good rabbi, gave them a long Scripture lesson. While walking on the road, without even having the Torah scroll in hand, the stranger gave them a new way of interpreting the ancient story of Israel and Moses' laws and the words of the prophets. He helped them understand that the Messiah was the Suffering Servant that Isaiah prophesied about. The true Messiah was not the warrior king like David; he was greater than David because his kingdom is not of this world. The true Messiah is the prince of peace who gives his life for the people. He is the Lamb of God. And they began to understand.

### **Hospitality**

And then Cleopas and his friend did something extraordinary. They invited the stranger to stay with them for the night. They did not what to believe about the

empty tomb and the death of Christ, but they knew that they should not leave this stranger out in the cold, alone and hungry. This act of hospitality was so simple and yet it was so important to the gospel.

Even though their eyes had been so clouded by tears they could not see who was with them, they knew in their hearts that they should welcome the stranger because that is what Jesus had taught them. Even as their world was torn apart by the violence of an evil empire and corrupt priests, they knew what Jesus would want them to do. Even though their minds could not make sense of Jesus' death, they could still keep the faith by welcoming the stranger.

And then brought out bread and wine for their supper. The stranger gave thanks and broke and gave it them just as Jesus had done at the Last Supper. And in that moment, they recognized who was with them. When they knew who he was, he disappeared, but it did not matter. He had already taught them everything they needed to know, and he had shown them that he was alive. Their eyes were opened and for a moment they saw their Lord and teacher. In the ritual of Holy Communion, they communed with Christ.

And their hearts were burning. Their hearts knew the truth better than their minds. Their hearts were a flame even before their eyes were opened.

## **Conclusion**

So long as Jesus followers continue to read the Scriptures with understanding, celebrate Holy Communion with faith, and do what Jesus taught us to do, we will walk with the Lord. May our hearts burn with love for the Lamb who was slain, and may our eyes be opened to see the world as Christ sees the world. Despite our doubts, grief, and anxiety about the future, may we welcome the stranger and let Christ be our guide.