

## Scriptures

### **Luke 24:13-35**

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 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?" 19 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, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to set Israel free. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 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. 24 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." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 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. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 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?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This is the Word of the Lord  
Thanks be to God

### Sermon:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Welcome to the third week after Easter. The great show is over. The excitement of Palm Sunday and Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem that so quickly turned to horror and shock at his execution has faded. The joy of the empty tomb, the testimony of the women and the appearances of Jesus have come and gone.

The emotional swings of the past few weeks have left us exhausted, and more than a little confused. What does it all mean? How does all this Easter business affect us? *What do we do now?*

In the face of these questions, we turn away and we return to our lives. We go back to our mundane living. There is a line from T.S. Elliot's *Cocktail Party* in which Reilly speaks of the human condition and says 'they may remember the vision they have had, but they cease to regret it; they maintain themselves by the common routine and learn to avoid excessive expectation.'

He's speaking of our tendency to lose ourselves in the everyday – when life is too real, too overwhelming - we cast our eyes downward and immerse ourselves in the details of life. In tuning up the lawnmower we tune out the larger world and its problems; in scrubbing the floor we avoid seeing the stains of the rest of the world.

When we have a hard time making sense of what is happening around us we escape into our routines, but we don't really find peace there – what we find is a form of oblivion – a form of not being.

This is what has happened with Cleopas and his wife. The chaos, the emotional turmoil of Holy Week has been too much for them. They went to Jerusalem for Passover and the gruesome end to the festival of celebration turned their holy city into a city of horrors. They went to remember the liberation and freedom of God's people Israel, and instead they witnessed oppression and death. They heard rumors of an empty tomb, but couldn't understand what could have meant.

In despair and confusion they turned their faces toward home –toward familiarity. Simon Peter and his crew did the same. After appearing to the disciples in the upper room, Jesus later found them back doing what they knew best – fishing.

As I looked around Sunday morning and compared that crowd with that of Easter morning I find the same thing – the spaces in the pews were a reminder of those who had disappeared, heading back to an Emmaus of their own in confusion, not knowing how to comprehend what they have seen and heard. Like Cleopas and his wife, it is like that they too will fail to recognize the one who accompanies them on the journey.

The risen Jesus is difficult to recognize. There was both a continuity and discontinuity when Jesus' disciples encountered the resurrected one. Part of the challenge was that the disciples did not expect a tip-of-the-spear in-breaking of the end time, but instead they were looking for a great resurrection at the 'last day.'

I wonder if we also fall into this way of thinking. Many of us have conceptions of rapture in which Jesus takes his own out of the world, and a great day of judgement and the return of Jesus in great power. These events are written of in the Bible, but too much focus on the end times blinds us to the presence of the stranger walking alongside us today. If we miss the stranger, we also miss the kingdom present amidst us.

If we return to Cleopas and his wife, we see a couple who are at their wits end. Their hopes had been raised to impossible heights on Palm Sunday, then dashed to the ground on Friday as they witnessed the crucifixion. They heard the rumours about what Mary had seen Sunday morning but, obviously, they didn't believe what had been said.

A curious thing happened with these two disciples as they walked along the dusty road towards home. A stranger approached them, asking what it was that they were talking about.

And then, they stood still. They stopped. When God enters the conversation we come to a crossroad. At issue are no longer the miles ahead, but instead the focus is on the moment at hand and the eternity that has just invaded time.

We too are invited to stop, and to stand at the crossroad with the risen Christ who asks us to reflect on the meaning of all that has taken place. God's word interrupts our idle, self-directed conversation and calls a halt to our mindless momentum. God's word stops us in our tracks and causes us to reconsider our view.

Let's consider the words that the Lord spoke to the two.

After they told their story to this stranger, he did an interesting thing. He told the same story back to them, but he made the story bigger. He began with the books of Moses, of which the first is Genesis. Jesus began at the very beginning, and showed them what the resurrection meant in the context of God's plan of creation and redemption.

The pattern of life emerging from death is a fundamental pattern of the entire bible. From the original chaos God created life; from the slavery in Egypt come freedom and a homeland; from the hopelessness of the exile came a renewed people.

Jesus demonstrated to them how it is that we often don't see the forest for the trees - when we look too closely at details, without drawing back to see the bigger picture, we don't understand the meaning and import of what it is that we see. Jesus explained the crucifixion and resurrection - not saying that it didn't happen the way they thought, but by explaining the necessity and the meaning of it. Now their hearts began to burn within them.

Through this recasting of the resurrection story into the larger narrative, Cleopas and his wife moved from despair to hope and joy. Their entire outlook and worldview shifted, simply by being allowed to view events, not through human eyes, but through God's eyes.

It was the presence of Christ that enabled them to begin to grasp the meaning of the paschal mystery. But even though their eyes were being opened, they still didn't fully understand – they didn't even know who it was they were speaking to.

When they did finally recognize Jesus it was in the breaking of bread. Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave the bread, in the same way that we still do to this day, and that action stirred the couples awareness of his presence, and they knew him then as the risen Lord, whose own body has been given for them.

Scriptures helped the disciples to understand what had just happened in Jerusalem, but they still did not recognize their Lord. Knowledge alone does not save – only our relationship with Jesus saves. This story of Cleopas and his wife shows us that the relationship is to be found in hospitality. Hospitality is also the answer to the question that was circulating in their minds as they went home in confusion – the question of 'what next?'

The hospitality of the travelling companions became their doorway to grace. They could well have rejected Jesus as he approached them on the road. They had a lot on their minds, they were deep in their own misery when the dusty traveller came to them; they had their own problems to worry about. Yet they stopped to talk to the stranger.

Not only did they speak with him on the road, but also as dusk approached they invited him to stay with them in their home. Hospitality involves vulnerability; welcoming a stranger is always risky. One can easily be taken advantage of on the road by an unscrupulous man or woman, and showing a stranger where you live and inviting them in leaves us open as well. When is the last time you invited someone you met on the street to come to your house for the night?

Actions speak louder than words, and our welcome of the stranger that overrides our need for self-protection provides a space where others may enter and feel at home. While we keep our eyes focused inwards on our own vulnerability, we forget the vulnerability of the stranger. If we feel exposed having another in our home, consider how exposed it feels to sleep in the home of someone you don't know.

Hospitality places us on a more equal footing, where we are both in a position where we must trust the other. The line between guest and host blurs; indeed, in the case of Jesus and the couple, it's not readily apparent who the guest is even though the episode takes place in the home of the two. In this case, though the guest, Jesus becomes the host of the meal.

This interchange of roles is quite revealing in that we learn that evangelism goes in both directions, and that the Spirit is present and active, not only in us, but in others as well. Hospitality promotes humility.

We are all travellers, walking down the road. We are all called to show hospitality to our fellow travellers, to care for them and feed them.

Remember Matthew 25 - the parable of the sheep and the goats, when the people ask 'When did we see you hungry and give you food, and when did we see you naked and give you clothes?' To which Jesus replied 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' We don't always know who it is that is speaking to us; we don't know who it is that we turn away.

This passage in Luke, of the dejected couple on their way back home to Emmaus tells us everything that we need to know about what Christ's church should be like. Like the two, we emerge from the emotional Easter season wondering what it all means, and what we are to do now.

The message seems clear:  
We need to lift our eyes from the road;  
look to the needs of others;  
listen;  
and dare to be vulnerable and hospitable.

After our acts of hospitality, welcome, and encouragement – when we finally sit down and break bread in the manner in which we have been taught, our eyes will become opened and we will realize that the evangelizer the evangelized, the host has become the guest, and the stranger is revealed to be our own Lord himself. Our participation in sacramental living reveals the simple fact that though we are at times blinded, wrapped up in our own struggles and confusion, Jesus has been with us all along.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.