

Message from Pastor John  
April 26, 2020

This Bible passage has always been one of my favorites. Jesus's resurrected self engages with two completely ordinary people.

In the ancient world the normal procedure was to only name and count men. Similar to our current census, they put particular responsibilities upon "heads of household". So when we are told Jesus addressed or fed 2,3 or 5k, it may well be only a male count and there could have been many more individual people.

The fact that one of them, though included, is unnamed is by many scholars interpreted as meaning it was a woman. But the fact that she is mentioned is also significant. Showing that in Jesus's eyes women were valued.

So in all probability we have a story of a married couple returning home from the Passover festival in Jerusalem. Obviously they were part of the group close to Jesus. They ref "some of those who were with us went to the tomb," but though followers they are also obviously not part of the inner circle.

This is not Peter, James or John. Not Mary or Joanna. This is Cleopas and his wife, about whom we know nothing, who have played no significant role in the drama...so far.

That is part of its attraction to me... I identify with these close but not intimate followers of Jesus. I feel a kinship with their "we had hoped he would be the one" and with their confusion and shock and even a sense of betrayal "**our** chief priests and leaders handed him over" and the eternal "why the cross" question.

They obviously feel that he is the one their entire religious upbringing had promised BUT the very priests and leaders upon whom they rely and who had taught them to expect a Messiah did not accept that Jesus was that promised Savior!

Then Jesus goes to leave. It reads like he has places to go and things to do and politely bids them farewell. BUT when he hears the genuineness of their offer of hospitality and hears their pain and confusion... he takes all the time in the world to patiently comfort and instructed them.

As well as appearing to be ordinary, dare I say minor characters, Jesus takes time to instruct and comfort them.

Two disciples, Mr & Mrs Cleopas, are walking away from the disaster of Good Friday and the puzzlement of Easter. Luke doesn't tell us why Emmaus is their destination. Are they fleeing to a hiding place? Do they have relatives there? Is it their home?

Most of the other disciples had decided to hunker down and stay put in Jerusalem, but these two keep walking. Jesus is their traveling companion for a time and gets in on the conversation.

"What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" he asks (v. 17). Cleopas wonders if their fellow traveler has been living in a cave for the last several days and goes on to tell him the story of what happened to Jesus of Nazareth, from their hopes about him and then his tragic crucifixion and the puzzlement of the empty tomb (vv. 18-24). They had hoped Jesus would be the One to take the nation toward a promised destination.

Now they seemed to be just walking with no real purpose in mind. As the stranger walks with them on this road to nowhere, he begins to tell them about a longer journey they'd all been on.

Starting with the journey of God's people from liberation in Egypt under Moses to the time of the prophets and through all the signs along the way, Jesus walks them through God's plan for his people and his own death and resurrection as both a destination and a new beginning.

The two disciples invite this stranger to stay with them and, when

sitting at table together, they suddenly recognize it's the risen Jesus they've been walking with all along. Jesus disappears, but they start walking back to Jerusalem and into a new future.

Emmaus wasn't their finish line after all, just another stop on the journey of following the Lord.

Some of the followers of Jesus, then and now perform great feats: bring healing; inspire multitudes; have wonderful Spirit gifts of learning or music or organizing; some even move mountains; a few sacrifice their very lives for their faith. I can't and I doubt Cleopas and partner could either.

It is all so miraculous and profound, but it is also so ordinary. Walking, chatting, hospitality, sharing a meal, being polite, listening to one another, showing concern and compassion.

I can do all of that!

And it all starts with walking.

But walking isn't what we do any more.

We now have to launch media campaigns to get people in our sedentary culture to walk farther than the distance from the couch to the refrigerator for the good of their own health. Some people link the rise in childhood obesity to the day kids stopped walking to school. We design whole pedestrian unfriendly cities and the car is king of the road in every sense of the word.

People in the ancient world had to walk!

\* If we take Matthew's narrative at face value, Jesus, as a young boy, would have walked about 400 miles with his parents during their return from Egypt to Nazareth.

\* Every devout male in Galilee would travel to Jerusalem three times a year for religious festivals, which meant a 240-mile round trip from Nazareth. If Jesus followed this pattern every year between the ages of 5 and 30, he would have walked 18,000 miles in trips to Jerusalem alone.

\* Based on the gospel accounts, Jesus traveled 3,125 miles in his three-year public ministry. His disciples would have walked many of those miles with him.

\* That means a conservative estimate of the distance Jesus walked during his lifetime was 21,525 miles. That's a lot of sandals!

If there's anything the Emmaus Road story teaches us, it's that the disciples of Jesus are at their best when they keep walking with him.

Discipleship is never a drive-by or fly-by process, in which we can look for instant results and ignore the people and places we whiz by every day.

Disciples of Jesus recognize that their lives are a journey of following Jesus and learning from him but also looking *for* him in the faces of strangers who join them on the way.

Disciples are willing to follow Jesus despite the dangers and potential pitfalls, and they offer hospitality to others who may not yet recognize him.

Disciples also know that *they can't walk the journey alone*.

Obviously I am moving a physical action to a spiritual action but I am sure you get the similarities.

Disciples celebrating Earth Day and concerned about pollution and climate change cannot afford to ignore the physical facts NOR should any of us ignore the facts of our spiritual obesity and indolence.

We need to walk with Jesus every day and even more wonderful and surprising --Jesus is there ready and willing to walk with us! On that walk Cleopas and his partner learned that as the Letter of Peter expresses it:

“He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.”

So “have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.”

Amen

### I Peter 1:17-23 **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

17 If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. 21 Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth[a] so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply[b] from the heart.[c] 23 You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

### Luke 24:13-35 **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

#### The Walk to Emmaus

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] 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.[b] 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,[c] 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 redeem Israel.[d] 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[e] 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[f] 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