

EASTER 2 (Luke 24:13-35) - APRIL 27, 2025

Luke's narratives frequently take us on the road. A journey brings Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. A road is the narrative setting for the parable of the Good Samaritan. A road leads the prodigal back home to his father. Jesus sets his eyes toward Jerusalem and takes to the road for ten chapters; this is known among scholars as the travel narrative where we find some of the most distinctively Lukan contributions to the story of Jesus. The roads continue in the Book of Acts where, for instance, Paul encounters the risen Jesus on his way to Damascus. There is something about travel that evokes Luke's literary and theological imagination. There is something about roads, the way roads bring us together, the way roads can pose a danger to us, the way roads become a symbol of a faith always on the move.

It is poignant then that the narrative of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus takes us to the conclusion of Luke's Gospel. The story is a narrative wonder. Irony, misunderstanding, drama, a reveal: these are components of a powerful story. Furthermore, a number of Lukan themes are woven together in this narrative: table fellowship, hospitality, faithfulness, discipleship. The scene on this road foreshadows the future of Christ's church in the Lukan imagery. This will be a church on the move, sent out by a Jesus who walks alongside us even when we don't recognize him.

Our scene is set on the same day as the women's discovery of the empty tomb following the crucifixion. The two disciples, Cleopas and his unnamed companion are walking, leaving Jerusalem to make the seven-mile jaunt to Emmaus. Why are they leaving Jerusalem? Do they fear for their lives now

that Jesus has been executed? We don't really know. All Luke tells us is that they are grieved about their recent experience. They are talking to one another, hoping to make sense of the nonsensical, when Jesus himself walks alongside them and joins them on their journey.

Jesus could certainly be a little coy, couldn't he? Here are the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, all abuzz with their visit to Jerusalem and the spectacular rumours emerging from the Passover situation. We are told that they "were kept from recognizing him." By whom, or by what, we ask as we wonder? Is this divine intervention in order to set up the tale? Or are we supposed to read something into this, something along the lines of "they were just so caught up in their own concerns that they couldn't see Jesus right in front of them?" Were they so grieved by their experience and so sure that Jesus was gone that they simply didn't expect him? Did Jesus look different after the resurrection? Was his face transformed? Was Jesus wearing a mask with a goofy mustache? We just don't know, and Luke does not tell us.

Anyhow, Jesus saunters up and asks, quasi-innocently: "What'cha talking about, guys?" Which, of course, gives an excellent opening for the story to proceed and for Jesus to get in a few of his final theological licks before his impending ascension. After all, somebody has got to understand all of this. Peter and the gang back home weren't at all handling it so well at this point!

In a strikingly ironic moment, when Jesus asks these two disciples what they are discussing, they are incredulous. Who doesn't know what has been happening in Jerusalem these days? It was all over the news; it was a

trending topic on Twitter!

Their dashed hopes are voiced: "... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel..." Had hoped. We invested our hopes in this Jesus, but he was not who we had hoped he would be. In response, Jesus outlines for them the meaning and significance of his own death, starting from Moses and the prophets. It was "necessary" that Jesus would suffer, die, rise, and be lifted up into "glory."

Our story leads us to consider a basic question. Where do we turn when things fall apart? Fall apart not only for us personally, but also for the world. What do we think of when the things we have trusted in, believed in, hoped in, seem to have failed us?

The men on the road to Emmaus are disheartened by the death of Jesus. They **had hoped** that he was the one who would redeem Israel. Despite the fact that they knew the story – they just had no idea what it really meant. It's a tale that is really a story that makes a promise to those reading the gospel then and now: in Christian worship we are encountered by the risen Christ and in Scripture, these most heartbreaking and realistic words, keep popping up: "But we had hoped ..."

"But we had hoped ..." So much is said in those four words, as they speak of a future that is not to be, a dream that created energy and enthusiasm but did not materialize, a promise that created faith that proved to be false. It speaks of a future that is closed off, now irrelevant, dead. And there are few things more tragic than a dead future. Once challenged to write a short-story

in six words, Ernest Hemingway supposedly replied by penning on a napkin: “For Sale: Baby shoes, never used.” It’s not just the tragedy of what happened that hurts, but the gaping hole of all that could have happened but won’t.

“But we had hoped ...” – heartbreaking words that can ring true. They are not the only truth, of course; there is much in this life that is beautiful, daring, confident, inspiring, and more, all of which deserves our gratitude. But there is also disappointment, heartbreak, and failure. And all too often we tend to gloss over this in church. Or if not gloss over it, at least feel the pressure to move by it too quickly toward some kind of resolution, fleeing the cross-like experiences of life for the promise of resurrection. And not only in church, but also in daily life.

A friend shares the news of a death of his sister, and we sympathize for a moment before changing the topic. Or a colleague shares her disappointment at not getting a promotion, and we remind her that at least she has a job.

Or we see an acquaintance we know, who has just gone through a dreadful loss, and we avoid him or her altogether because we just don’t know what to say. We don’t mean to be callous or insensitive, we are just at such a loss with ... loss. We feel inadequate to the task of confronting the darkness of our lives and this world and so we flee to the light in denial.

In the church this penchant is almost pernicious. And perhaps that’s somewhat understandable. We are, after all, people of the resurrection. And

so when reading this story we often hurry to the burning hearts part of the narrative, celebrating with the disciples their encounter with the Risen Christ. But just as before, before there is resurrection, there is the cross, and before there are burning hearts, there are broken ones.

Can we be a place that welcomes broken hearts? That sounds easier than it is because it's not at all about treating our broken hearts as a means to an end. It's about acknowledging the cross so that we can get on to the resurrection. We need to recognize that part and parcel of being human is being broken. And it is to these heartbroken disciples, in today's reading and in this Sunday's worship, that the Risen Christ comes, walking along with us on the road, astonished that we don't see as we ought, teaching us the Scriptures that we might understand, sharing his presence through bread and wine, and granting burning hearts, that transport us back into the world.

But it all starts with broken hearts. We need to allow people to admit their darkness or own their hurt. The ones who are not ready to do so won't be persuaded by us, and the ones who carry this with them daily, like a snail carries its shell, don't need to be convinced, only invited and allowed ... invited and allowed to share their disappointment that the cancer returned, the addiction wasn't overcome, the beloved died, the lover betrayed, the child walked away, the job didn't materialize, the congregation disappointed, the family hurt instead of helped ... and so on and so on.

They only need to be invited and allowed to grieve a future that will never be ... in order that they may possibly hear and receive the future God has created and prepared for them ... when they are ready to hear ... and as they

are able.

Though the men had begun to understand the connection between the crucified Jesus and the Risen Christ, they still did not make the connection between the Risen Christ and the person in their midst. Talking, speaking, reading, words alone did not make that happen. That was something that had to be experienced, and all mystical experiences, are in some ways beyond words.

The story takes one more twist. As they approach their destination, the two disciples notice that Jesus seems to be planning to keep walking. (Where was he headed? Again, Luke leaves us in the dark!) They exhort Jesus to stay with them. They offer hospitality to one whom they believe is a stranger. They offer to be hosts to this travelling companion and “new” friend.

But as soon as the table is set, Jesus upends the expected social roles. He becomes the host by blessing the bread and sharing it. Now, remember, they still don’t know that they are once again dining with Jesus; they don’t realize that their dashed hopes are restored in the resurrected body of this “stranger.”

Somehow, when Jesus played host at the meal in their home, the universe shifted. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.” And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

What follows is fascinating. First, the men were able to look back on their

experience and see Christ in it. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Word and sacrament, scripture and experience, work together to bring us into the presence of the Christ, and one is not complete without the other. They weave in and out; word explaining experience, worship and ritual both underscoring and heightening the meaning of the word.

So when Jesus does the most Jesus thing of all, everything changes. What do you think is the most characteristic activity of Jesus? When we imagine Jesus, what is he doing? For many, he is on the cross or – he may be preaching to a crowd or – he may be healing the sick with the touch of his hands or – he may be enthroned at the right hand of God.

For Luke, however, Jesus is most Jesus at an ordinary table, at an ordinary meal infused with significance because of the people gathered around the food. Jesus is there at this table and so are all the sinners and tax collectors with whom Jesus shared meals. But not only that! Also at this table are the many powerful people with whom Jesus also dined.

One of the most characteristic activities of Jesus’ ministry in Luke is eating. He is accused early in the Gospel of being a glutton and a drunkard; worse, he eats with all the wrong people! So, it’s instructive that it’s not his teachings that open their eyes. It’s not his presence. It’s his sharing of bread with his friends. It’s his blessing of food. In this sharing of bread at an ordinary table, we catch a glimpse of Jesus’ transformative kingdom.

In Luke, eating is a radical act because it breaks down cultural boundaries.

In Luke, the resurrected Jesus shares that bread once again with his followers. And in feeding them, Jesus opens their eyes, helping them see that Jesus was with them the whole time.

There's a lot of stuff we're still trying to figure out, ourselves. We, too, are "foolish... and slow of heart to believe." But Jesus is with us, nonetheless, whether we recognize him or not. In word and sacrament, the Christ makes himself known as we break the bread and remember.

The promise to us today is that the Risen Christ does come to us in the midst of our dashed hopes and shattered dreams. The risen Christ comes to us in the Written Word, the Risen Christ comes to us in the Proclaimed Word, the Risen Christ comes to us in the Lived Word of worship and sacrament, the Risen Christ comes to us in our moments of hospitality and generosity with others, both friends and strangers. The Risen Christ comes to us, and never leaves us alone.

The plot of the walk to Emmaus scene epitomizes the plot of the whole Gospel of Luke. Jesus is our companion on the way, but we do not recognize him. The astounding tale of the women had not been enough to kindle the faith of these two men. Their recognition of Jesus came when he took bread, blessed, and broke it." In that moment, recognition dawned. In that moment they had a change of heart: from being "slow of heart to believe" to having hearts that burned within them as he spoke to them on the road.

They feel compelled to witness, to share with others what has happened to them. They hustle back to Jerusalem to tell the others of their encounter with

the risen Christ, of how “he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

So how do **we** walk the road to Emmaus? There is no doubt that the story directs us to the church, where we may encounter Jesus in the word and the sacraments. But not to "the church" that's equated with the institution and Sunday worship. We are directed instead to the church that meets a very ordinary world, a world marked by human loss and human hospitality.

Yes, the story resonates with a sense of the church and its mission and of the tremendous power of the word and the sacraments to connect us with the presence of God. But its image is of God and a church that walk alongside human confusion, human pain and a human loss of faith and hope. Emmaus invites us to expect God to find us. Emmaus challenges us to see that it isn't our unshakable faith and deep spirituality that connect us with the risen Christ, but our smallest gestures of hospitality and friendship.

What makes the story remarkable is how unremarkable it is. We can understand Jesus appearing to the remaining eleven disciples, to the faithful women who followed him, and even to Paul – all very practical appearances in terms of establishing the church and its mission. But Cleopas and his companion are nobodies who have no idea of what God might be doing. They could be any one of us.

Their road to Emmaus is an ordinary road, the road each of us is on every day. This is what sets this story apart from other accounts of Jesus' Easter appearances. It teaches us how to see and what to look for on the everyday

road we walk. It teaches us that by offering hospitality to the stranger, by showing kindness to the alien and refugee, by sharing fellowship around this table and sharing in all the suffering in all corners of the world, we truly welcome Jesus as our guest. It is at these times and in these places of being taken and broken, blessed and given, that our eyes are on Christ and our hearts are on fire.

Christ is risen! Christ is with us always! Alleluia!!

PRAYERS FOR APRIL 27, 2025

Gracious God, we recall how the initial sadness of the disciples was turned to joy and how their fear was turned to courage through their experiences of witnessing your risen presence. As your Easter people, help us to share the good news of your living presence among us to others, especially those around us who feel no hope and dwell in fear and sadness.

The world lost a great leader this week – Pope Francis – head of the Catholic Church since 2013 until his death at the age of 88 on April 21st, just one day after giving his Easter address.

In honour of the man who brought liberation to many by denouncing the twin evils of poverty and inequality, speaking out against the death penalty, and making strides to include the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community, we will be interspersing some of Pope Francis's quotes with the prayers today.

Having recently observed Earth Day, we acknowledge, with gratitude, Pope Francis's concern for the environment, specifically regarding deforestation, pollution, and human-caused climate change that is disproportionately harming the poor.

We acknowledge that some have had a difficult experience with the Catholic Church, including our Indigenous siblings, who were harmed through government and church-sanctioned residential schools and foster care. We give thanks for the Pope's work in apologizing to those harmed by Catholicism's colonial history, asking for forgiveness for the harm done to Indigenous peoples in Canada. We recall his move to reduce the infrastructures of the papacy to improve transparency and accountability within the Roman Catholic Church; his desire for inclusion of all people, especially the poor, homeless and marginalized; and his pivotal role in promoting reconciliation, peace, and inter-faith dialogues.

Loving God, we come before you this week acknowledging that we live in a world where death and pain are constantly evident, a world where the faithful eventually depart, a world that is ever-changing. We give thanks for the legacy of love and faithfulness shown through Pope Francis, and through those world leaders who strive for justice, equality, and peace building.

A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just.
(Pope Francis)

And so, we pray that mercy will be shown in situations where it is urgently needed. In Gaza, where 15 medics died and were buried in mass graves because of the professional failures of the Israeli military. We pray for an end to the bloodshed and terror that so many innocent families are experiencing, especially after Israeli President, Benjamin Netanyahu, claims to have no choice but to continue fighting, citing his desire to destroy Hamas, free the hostages, and ensure that there are no more threats to Israel. We pray that your grace and mercy will fall upon those who are being destroyed because of hatred and spite.

We lift up the faithful Christians of Gaza – many of whom knew the Pope well and considered him a dear friend. During the 18 months of war, the Pope would call nightly to check on their well-being. Even during his final address, the Pope urged for an end to the war. And so, we pray for the minority Christians in Gaza who this week have lost a source of comfort and support.

Too often we participate in the globalization of indifference. May we strive instead to live in global solidarity.

(Pope Francis)

Lord, we acknowledge that it is easy to avert our eyes from situations which trouble us. Whether those situations are close to home: such as the opioid epidemic in Canada and the United States, the lack of affordable housing which is causing many in our world to be forced into homelessness, or the human trafficking that happens under our noses.

Open our eyes to situations which seem much more removed from us, such as the United Nations World Food Program that is being forced to halt life-saving aid for more than 3.6 million people worldwide due to a lack of funding.

We pray that we would not become indifferent to the wars raging in our world including in Ukraine and Russia where, despite calling an Easter Truce, allegations of violations from both sides occurred within only 30 hours.

It's hypocrisy to call yourself a Christian and chase away a refugee or someone seeking help, someone who is hungry or thirsty, toss out someone who is in need of help ... if I am a Christian but do these things, I'm a hypocrite.

(Pope Francis)

We pray for areas in the world where people are unsafe because of who they are, who they love, or where they live. We pray for the United States where massive nationwide deportations have occurred, oftentimes putting people in dangerous situations in their country of origin. We pray that all deportees, immigrants, and refugees will find shelter and security.

We pray for members of the Filipino community in Vancouver especially the families and friends grieving their loved ones killed last evening by an SUV driver who drove into the cultural street celebration in Vancouver. Surround them with your comforting presence.

We lift up our own country in the upcoming federal elections on April 28th and we pray that the newly elected Federal Members of Parliament, as well as the new Prime Minister, would govern with fairness, justice, and compassion for the common good of all citizens.

We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded, and preach peace.

(Pope Francis)

Creator God, even though the numerous political, economic and social issues impacting our world often feels heavy and overwhelming, when we often wonder what we can do to make a difference, we give thanks that the Good News still has the last word. We also keep company with the travellers on the Emmaus Road who felt the strange burning of the truth and hope and love weaving into the sadness that consumed them on their walk. We find ourselves in the eternal movement between fear and faith, doubt and conviction, wonder and worry. Yet, we trust that you are present with us in all circumstances.

Be with your church throughout the world so that it continues to testify to our Lord's resurrection and the hope of new beginnings. We pray for Bishops Susan and Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Anne Germond, congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, St. Peter's Estonian Lutheran in Vancouver and Pr. Andres Rebane, Peace Lutheran in Vernon, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, Holy Trinity Lutheran, an ELCA congregation in Port Angeles that has reached out to us interested in building a companion relationship of friendship with us. Bless the ministry of all pastors, priests, deacons, musicians and volunteers.

Compassionate God, visit and comfort the sick and suffering. Heal and strengthen weak bodies, bring peace and calmness to confused minds. Compassionate God, give them strength and hope. Support them with your great love and mercy. Bless all those who support and provide care to them. We pray that your blessings go with Doris Bieberdorf who will be joining a Mercy ship from Madagascar later this week, to serve for three months as an occupational therapist. May she and the other professionals be a blessing to all those they will serve.

Gracious God, in these often confusing, difficult, and complicated times, help us better to live out the words of Pope Francis who urged us to believe that ***we all have a duty to do good*** and that we must always ***find new ways to spread the Word of God to every corner of the world.*** All this we pray in the power of the risen Christ.

Amen.

Our Father ...