

Then Their Eyes Were Opened  
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**Luke 24:13-35**

<sup>13</sup> Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>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?’ <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.’ <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. <sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?’ <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ <sup>35</sup>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 reading includes some of my favorite words from our language around communion. Later, you’ll hear me say, “According to Luke, when our risen Lord was at table with his disciples, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” If you’ve been here on a communion Sunday, like today, you may have noticed that I like to emphasize that it was **then** that their eyes were opened. Only once they had shared a meal did they realize that Christ was in their midst. There is something I love in imagining Christ handing them each bread and them suddenly realizing who it was before them. I love the idea that, in such an intimate gesture, as I am fed by you, I suddenly know you. Frankly, it’s one of the greatest losses I feel because of my myriad dietary challenges – I miss out on being fed by you and I’m disenchanted by the idea of feeding others something from my limited diet. There is something sacred around any table, in any meal prepared for another, by another.

Scholars will remind that in the disciples' encounter with Christ, not only did he feed them bread but he fed them from the scriptures, the Word, before they sat together for a meal, and it was the combination of the two which caused their eyes to be opened. It is why the description of my position, up until recently, was Minister of Word **and** Sacrament<sup>1</sup>. Both are needed for knowing Christ. And I don't deny that or disagree with it. I have simply romanticized the idea of eating with another over being taught by another. So I love to retell how, when the disciples were fed, **then** their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

There is much more to this story, though, specifically to this reading from Luke, which takes place late in the day of what we call Easter. I have jumped ahead to the good news. That's not where we begin. These two disciples, not of the central twelve, had been in Jerusalem for Passover, a time of celebratory remembrance of all the good that God did for the Israelites in redeeming them from the oppression of slavery in Egypt and in celebratory acknowledgement of all the good God still does in redeeming God's people. As they joined in the meal which is central to the celebration of Passover, Jesus was sharing the Passover meal with the twelve disciples. The next day, the one they called Messiah, the one whom these followers thought was sent by God to redeem them from the oppression of the Romans, was tortured and crucified. As the two disciples tell Jesus on the road, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

I think back to the tsunami in 2004 which killed hundreds of thousands the day after Christmas. We had just celebrated God coming into this world as one of us to show us how greatly God loves us and the next day we were left to try to understand how so much sorrow and death could happen in a world which God loves. These are the things that defy human explanation and challenge how we understand the God in whom we have faith. These Jews had just thanked God for saving them from a terrible situation and their hope of being saved from the terrible situation *du jour* had been killed. I imagine that how they understood the God in whom they had faith was challenged that day, especially because those who represented God, the chief priests and leaders, were the ones who had him killed. "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

These are the men whom Jesus meets on the road out of Jerusalem to their village of Emmaus. These same men had just that day experienced a glimmer of hope in the story of the women who visited the tomb but, because another group of visitors to the tomb could not verify the presence nor the story of the angels, they remained uncertain. To this uncertainty Jesus replies, saying, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" before he explains that the story,

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<sup>1</sup> Now the PC(USA) uses the language of Teaching Elder.

the good news of God's love for the world, does not end at the tomb – “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and **then** enter into his glory?”

Here the disciples have reached their destination. I like to think that they urged Jesus to stay in part because they wanted the conversation, the teaching, to continue. What we know is that they urge Jesus strongly to stay “because it is almost evening and the day is nearly over.” You may remember Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan who tended to a man whom was beaten and left by the side of the road. The reason this illustration was so useful for the audience to whom Jesus was speaking was that bandits were an expected difficulty of life. The disciples weren't urging Jesus because it was dinner time but because it would be dangerous to continue on the road in the dark. So Jesus “went in to stay with them.”

We know that next they sat down to eat and Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Just like the women at the tomb who experienced so briefly the promise of the resurrection, these disciples had hope restored in an instant. “That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem.” Remember the threat of bandits? Remember that night had fallen? Remember that it was seven miles, or two hours at a quick pace, to Jerusalem? “That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together....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 news was too important to wait to share, bandits or no bandits! They had been with Jesus and, above that, they had recognized him. The story continues with **us** who have been with Jesus in the Word and the meal, and have recognized him. You know what's coming, don't you? This same hour, what threats, what worries will **you** disregard for the greater import of sharing the good news? This same hour, to whom will you tell what happened to you on your road to faith? To whom will you tell how Jesus has been made known to you in the breaking of the bread?

Let us pray: Risen Lord, in this Eastertide, again our prayer is that you give us eyes and ears and mouths to be your faithful and faith-filled witnesses. Amen.