

And all of a sudden, in a blinding flash of revelation, their eyes were opened, and they realized who he was—this stranger who sat at their table, this stranger who’d appeared out of *nowhere*, this stranger who *knew* things he had no way of knowing—this “stranger” was no stranger at all. This stranger was *the risen Christ*. Jesus Christ, whom they’d thought was *dead*, wasn’t dead at all. He had risen.

I think Cleopas and his friend knew, right then and there, that they’d never make it to Emmaus—that place where they were going to get away from Jerusalem, that place where they were going to seek solace, that place where they were going to forget the loss of hope they thought had died that day with Jesus. They’d never make it to Emmaus, because they now didn’t *have* to go to Emmaus—

Because now, they weren’t hopeless anymore. Their hope hadn’t died after all. Their hope, instead, was sitting right there at the table with them, eating dinner with them as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Their hope had been returned to them that day, on the dusty road to Emmaus, in the person of Jesus Christ.

It’s like that for us, too, you know—that Christ comes to *us* when we’re walking *our* roads to Emmaus—those places *we* go when life gets to be too much for *us*, those places *we* go to get away from Jerusalem, those places *we* go when *we* feel hopeless.

Because it’s there on that road—that road where we’ve given up hope, that road where expectations fail us, that road where we finally, *finally*, have given up, *period*—

It’s there, on that road, that Christ finds us.

It’s there that Christ opens our eyes.

It’s there that Christ burns in our hearts—that point at which we’re the most broken, the most vulnerable, the most despondent—that’s where Christ finds us. *That’s*

where Christ reveals himself to us. Because *that’s* where we’ve acknowledged, not only to ourselves, but also to *him*, that we can’t make it alone, that we’re not invincible, that we need help.

We all, *all* of us, have a place we go to escape Jerusalem—that place where hope has died.

We all, *all* of us, have an Emmaus—that place we go to forget this.

And we all, *all* of us, travel to Emmaus at one time or another in our lives, trudging along, putting one foot in front of the other as we walk that dusty road. Times when happiness seems but a distant dream; times when fear and grief and sorrow consume us and paralyze us and make us unsure not only of where we’re going, but of *who we are*. Times when we just can’t imagine a future any different than our less-than-optimal now.

Thankfully, though, we all, *all* of us, *also* have Jesus Christ, who meets us on our road to Emmaus. Appearing in the most surprising of ways and when we least expect him—*that’s* where Christ rises up and meets us, bringing with him the hope that *we can’t find on our own*, the hope we thought had died in Jerusalem, the hope we thought we’d never see again.

That’s where Christ meets us—on that dusty road to Emmaus. *That’s* where we encounter the risen Christ.

Please pray with me:

Gracious God, we come to you this morning broken, vulnerable, and despondent. We come to you this morning understanding all too well the hopelessness of Cleopas and his friend that day—that day they walked to Emmaus—because we have felt that way, as well—hopeless. We’ve felt, as they did, dejected, demoralized, discouraged, and despairing. We’ve felt, as they did, the seeming pointlessness of life, the frustration of trying to no

avail, the futility of trying again and again and again and getting nowhere.

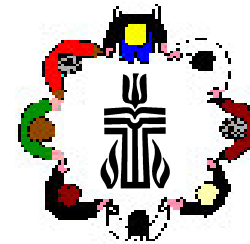
And so we come to you this morning giving thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ, who by the power of the Holy Spirit enters our lives at *just these times*—these times when we, too, walk the road to Emmaus—bringing with him the hope we thought was gone forever, the hope we need to carry on, the hope we know is hope realized in the person of the resurrected Christ.

Because we know that the resurrected Christ is *you*, come to us in human form as the gift of Easter—your promise that this hope is ours not only today, but forever.

Amen.

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“The Road to Emmaus”

Sermon by
Rev. Nancy Lynch

Third Sunday of Easter
April 6, 2008



Luke 24:13-35

“Reaching Up to God ...
Reaching Out to Others.”

Luke 24:13-35

The time was 33 AD. The place was a dusty road just outside of Jerusalem. Two disciples, trudging along, putting one foot in front of the other as they walked together along a road that would take them to ... Emmaus.

Emmaus. The city or town or village or whatever it was of “Emmaus” has never been identified with any degree of accuracy. Although most scholars (and scripture itself) place it somewhere around seven miles from Jerusalem, others think it might be as far away as 19 miles.

It doesn't really matter, though. It doesn't really matter that we cannot pinpoint *where* Emmaus is (or was) with any degree of accuracy. Because what's important about Emmaus is not *where* it was, but *what* it was. Or, rather, what it *represents*, which is this: That place where we go when our hope is gone—that place where we go to escape.

Think about it. Cleopas and his friend, two disciples of Jesus, had just left Jerusalem. They'd just witnessed the execution, in the most painful way possible, of Jesus, their spiritual leader and teacher.

In a flash, it seemed, the dreams on which they'd set their sights were *gone*. In the span of less than a week, the certainty in which they'd wrapped their future was replaced with a bewildering cloak of confusion. Impossibly, Jesus was dead—*Jesus was dead*. He had died three days ago on a crude wooden cross, and with him died their *hope*.

The kingdom of God—a kingdom of joy they were *sure* would be ruled by Jesus—suddenly lay in ruins. Deliverance from fear and oppression and persecution seemed no longer feasible. Any expectation they had that their future would be any different, any *better*, than it was right now, had simply

vanished. Because, impossibly, Jesus was dead. *Jesus was dead*.

We can relate, can't we? We've all had those times in our lives when we've felt like Cleopas and his friend, haven't we? Maybe you're having one of those times right now—one of those times when happiness seems but a distant dream; one of those times when fear and grief and sorrow consume you and paralyze you and make you unsure not only of where you're going, but of *who you are*. Times when you just can't imagine a future any different than your less-than-optimal “now.”

Times, in other words, when *your* hope, like that of Cleopas and his friend, has simply vanished.

So you decide, like Cleopas and his friend decided, to go to Emmaus. *Emmaus*. That place where you go to get away from Jerusalem—that place where your hope has died. *Emmaus*. That place where you go to seek solace. *Emmaus*. That place where you go not to *grieve* your loss of hope, but to *forget* your loss of hope as completely as you possibly can.

Presbyterian pastor Frederick Buechner describes Emmaus like this:

“[Emmaus is any] place we go in order to escape—a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands and say, ‘Let the whole damned thing go hang. It makes no difference anyway.’ Emmaus may be buying a new suit or a new car or smoking more cigarettes than you really want ... Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred.”

Emmaus, in other words, is wherever we go to get away from it all, when “all” gets to be just too much.

Where's *your* Emmaus? Where do *you* go to forget? When life gets to be too much for *you*, where is it that *you* go?

Is your Emmaus, as Frederick Buechner suggests, a place where you drown your sorrows? Or is it maybe a place where you indulge in desserts you know you should pass up? Does your Emmaus consist of a series of shopping malls where you go to buy things you can't afford, but which you buy anyway, just because it makes you (for the moment, anyway) feel better?

Or is your Emmaus a place of activity—a place where you fill every waking moment of every single day with things and things to *do*—things for your family, things for your work, things for your community, even things for your *church*—anything and everything you can think of that will fill your time so you don't have to think about your loss of hope—so you don't have to remember that you're on the road to Emmaus?

We all, *all* of us, have a place we go to get out of Jerusalem—that place where hope has died.

We all, *all* of us, have an Emmaus. And so did Cleopas and his friend, because Emmaus was where they were headed that day, on that dusty road, three days after Jesus' crucifixion.

As they walked, though—as they were putting one foot in front of the other, as they sought to leave Jerusalem behind—as they walked on their way to Emmaus, they met a stranger—a stranger who, incredibly as it seemed, knew *nothing* about what had happened.

He had to have been living in a vacuum, they thought, to *not know* about Jesus; to not know that Jesus had been handed over to the chief priests and condemned to die; to not know that Jesus *had*, in fact, been crucified; to not know that Jesus' body was now missing from

his tomb; to not know that *angels*, of all things, had told them that Jesus was no longer dead, but instead was very much *alive*.

And so they told the stranger all these things, all these things that had happened—expecting, no doubt, that the stranger would be just as shocked and appalled and bereft of hope as *they* now were, as they walked that dusty road to Emmaus.

But the stranger was *not* shocked and appalled at their news, as they'd surely thought he would be—he seemed, instead, shocked and appalled at *them*. Did they not understand, he asked them, what it all meant? Could they not see that what had happened was *only* what the prophets had been saying would happen for the past, oh, two thousand years or so? Were they so slow of heart—so lacking in faith—that they could not realize that Jesus was the *Messiah*?

And so, as they seemed to *not* understand these things, he began to explain it to them. He started right at the beginning, with Moses; he moved right on through the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the rest; and then, finally, he finished up with current events.

The day grew long, however, and soon the travelers found themselves at the outskirts of Emmaus—at the city limits, as it were. And so they stopped for the night. And, according to the hospitality traditions of the day, they invited the stranger to stay with them. The stranger accepted their invitation, so they settled in for the evening, prepared a simple meal, and sat down to share it together.

And then the most amazing thing happened. This stranger—their *guest*—took the bread he'd just been offered, and just as if he were the *host* and not the *guest*, he said grace—he thanked God for the meal they were about to eat. And he gave them the bread to eat, and they ate it.