

It was still the day of the resurrection when Cleopas and another disciple set out from Jerusalem. Whether they were simply heading home or quietly putting distance between themselves and the place where everything had fallen apart is hard to say. Fear has a way of disguising itself as practicality. After all, Jesus had been labeled a false prophet by the religious authorities and a troublemaker by the empire. That is not a combination that ends well, and it did not. He was crucified and sealed in a tomb, and then, as far as anyone could tell, his body was gone. If you were trying to make sense of it without leaping to resurrection, the most reasonable explanation was not a miracle but a theft. Not exactly the kind of detail that inspires confidence.

Yes, the women had gone to the tomb and found it empty. Yes, they spoke of a vision of angels. And Peter had gone to see for himself, finding the tomb just as they had said, though without any heavenly messengers appearing to him along the way. It all felt unresolved, like a story missing its final chapter. And so, like so many pilgrims after Passover, Cleopas and his companion took to the road, walking away from the confusion, carrying with them grief, questions, and perhaps just a little bit of guarded hope that they were not quite ready to name.

The road to Emmaus would have been crowded, filled with travelers returning home, exchanging stories, comparing experiences, and perhaps arguing about whose relative packed the best food for the journey. Into that ordinary stream of humanity comes a stranger who asks a simple question: what are you talking about? Luke lets us in on the secret that it is Jesus, but the disciples do not know. Their eyes, we are told, were kept from recognizing him. It is such a curious phrase, almost as if God has decided that this moment needs to unfold slowly, like a good story that refuses to rush to its ending.

And here is the surprising part. These two disciples, who are confused and grieving and not entirely sure what they believe anymore, do not shut down or withdraw. They open up. They tell the stranger everything. They speak of Jesus as a prophet, mighty in word and deed. They speak of their dashed hopes. They even share the strange rumors that refuse to go away. There is a kind of holy honesty here, the kind that does not pretend certainty when certainty is nowhere to be found.

Jesus, still unrecognized, responds by reframing their story. He does not scold them so much as stretch their understanding, walking them through the scriptures and showing how suffering and redemption have always been woven

together. And then, just as things are getting interesting, he acts as though he will continue on his way. Which might be the most divine move of all, because it creates space for invitation.

And they do invite him. They urge the stranger to stay. They offer him food, shelter, and a place at their table. It is an act of simple hospitality, the kind that might not even seem remarkable on an ordinary day. Yet it is here, in that shared meal, that everything changes. When he takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them, their eyes are opened. They recognize him. And then, just as suddenly, he is gone.

Apparently, Jesus still has a flair for dramatic timing.

But what remains is even more important. Their hearts are burning within them. Not with fear this time, but with recognition, with faith rekindled, with the quiet but undeniable sense that God has been with them all along, even when they did not see it. And so they do the only thing that makes sense. They turn around and go back to Jerusalem, back to the place they had left, back to the community, back to the story that is not over after all.

My dear friends, we know this road. We have all walked it in one way or another. There are moments when the world feels uncertain, when the news is heavy, when conflict and suffering seem to dominate the headlines, and when hope can feel like it is always just a step out of reach. We live in a time when wars continue, when communities are divided, when many people feel anxious about the future. We see with our own eyes how even our Christian faith can be distorted as we watch a US president fashion himself as Jesus and criticize the Pope for urging the world to pursue peace. Where are we? What are we doing? Is this the wrong place to be? It does not take much imagination to understand why someone might quietly start walking away from Jerusalem, just to catch their breath.

And yet, this story reminds us that Christ meets us on that road, not after we have figured everything out, not once our faith is restored, polished and presentable, but right there in the middle of our confusion. He meets us in conversation, in scripture, and perhaps most powerfully, in one another. Especially in one another.

Because notice where recognition finally happens. Not in a grand miracle that forces belief. Not in a moment of overwhelming proof. It happens at a table, in an

act of welcome, in the breaking of bread. In other words, it happens in relationships. It happens when space is made for the stranger, when generosity overrides fear, when love becomes tangible. It happens in the moment we remember who he is, what he taught us, and who he calls us to be.

In a world that often encourages us to be suspicious, to draw lines, to fabricate false idols, to protect what is ours, that is no small thing. Choosing hospitality, choosing compassion, choosing to see Christ in the other is both deeply faithful and, at times, quietly rebellious. It is how resurrection continues to take shape in the world, and defies empires, violence, and oppression.

I will admit that there have been many days, even in ministry, when I have found myself asking God why. Days when faith feels less like a triumphant declaration and more like an ongoing conversation, sometimes even an argument. If anything, being engaged in faith does not eliminate struggle. It gives us a place to bring it. It gives us a partner in the dialogue. When life is good, there is someone to thank. When life is difficult, there is someone to question, to lean on, even to wrestle with.

Faith, after all, is not perfection. It is relationship. It is movement. It is the willingness to stay on the road, even when the destination feels unclear and

waylaid with the words of false prophets who seek to undermine it all. And yes, sometimes we still try to take control, because life can feel overwhelming. That is not a failure of faith. It is part of being human.

The good news in this story is not that the disciples suddenly become flawless believers. It is that they are loved and accompanied exactly as they are. Their confusion does not disqualify them. Their fear does not exclude them. Their imperfect understanding does not prevent Christ from being present with them, revealed to them, or sharing the table with them.

And the same is true for us.

So we continue on the road. We ask our questions. We share our stories. We stand up for what we know to be right and we challenge what we know to be morally wrong. We let our light shine. And to those who come in love and with a true desire to be at peace- we make room at our tables. We break bread together. And somewhere in those ordinary, holy moments, our eyes are opened again and again.

And if we are very lucky, or perhaps just very attentive, we might even find ourselves saying with a smile that Christ has been with us the whole time, even when we did not recognize him at first.

That, to me, is very good news.

Amen.