

## *Where is the Road to Emmaus?*

### Luke 24:13-35 (The Message)

That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

He asked, “What’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

He said, “What has happened?”

They said, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn’t see Jesus.”

Then he said to them, “So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don’t you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?” Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: “Stay and have supper with us. It’s nearly evening; the day is done.” So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

Back and forth they talked. “Didn’t we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?”

They didn’t waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: “It’s really happened! The Master has been raised up—Simon saw him!”

Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

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Have you ever wondered who named the street or road you live on? We live on Painted Pony Trail in Albuquerque. You might think it was named after the famous New Mexican painted pony sculptures. But there’s also a Spinning Wheel Drive in my neighborhood. I think the person who picked the street

names loved that old rock and roll song by Blood, Sweat and Tears: *“Someone's waitin' just for you / Spinnin' wheel's spinnin' true / Drop all your troubles by the river side / Ride a painted pony / let the spinning wheel fly.”*

Our story this morning takes place on a well-known thoroughfare, the road to Emmaus. It's easy to imagine that dusty lane with two despondent travelers walking seven miles outside of Jerusalem. But if you travel to the Holy Land, or do a Google search, you won't find an Emmaus Road street sign. Biblical archaeologists don't know the exact location. There are four different historic sites that may have been where they were headed. But no one agrees on the evidence which just adds to the mystery of Luke's story.

Emmaus is not so much a place on the map as a place in our hearts and minds. As Author Fredrick Buechner said, “Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die...Emmaus is where we go, where these two went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life.”

I've been on that road. Haven't you? The boulevard of broken dreams? The highway of hopelessness? The intersection of what is and what might have been? Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor described it as “...the road you walk when your team has lost, your candidate defeated, your loved one has died – the long road back to the empty house, the piles of unopened mail, to life as usual, if live can ever be usual again...”

Friends, the road to Emmaus is where we go when we want to escape the pain of living. But it is also the road where our risen Lord comes to us as he came to Cleopas and his companion. Emmaus is where we rendezvous with God because God never gives up on us. Emmaus is where we experience the presence of the risen Christ because he does not leave us comfortless.

Barbara Brown Taylor put it this way, “The blindness of the two disciples does not keep their Christ from coming to them. He does not limit his post-resurrection appearances to those with full confidence in him. He comes to the disappointed, the doubtful, the dejected. He comes to those who do not know their Bible, who do not recognize him even when they are walking right beside him. He comes to those who have given up and headed back home...”

So where is the road to Emmaus? Where can we have a rendezvous with God? Where can we experience the presence of the risen Christ? It may be difficult to locate a street sign marked Emmaus Road, but we can discover Jesus traveling with us along life's way.

**The road to Emmaus can be as common as the driveway outside our homes.** I made that discovery when my son Daniel spoke on Youth Sunday at Libby's church a few years ago. He shared this story.

*“When I was young, I loved baseball and played for the Balmoral Presbyterian Church team in Memphis. My brother also enjoyed it, but not as much as me, so it was a big deal when I convinced him to play catch in the front yard. One day, my brother and I were throwing the ball farther and farther to show how much better we were than the other, and it kept escalating.*

*I retrieved the ball from the street, where my brother had overthrown it. I threw it back to him as hard as I could. He was standing next to our blue Nissan Quest in the driveway. My brother did not catch the ball, but the window of our minivan did.*

*My brother looked at me in horror as the ball shattered the glass window. I was speechless. Then I started to yell at my brother, blaming him for the accident because he was too inept to catch the ball. He did the same to me. We were trying to avoid any punishment from our parents.*

*My brother and I eventually stopped yelling at each other, agreed to tell our parents together, and face the impending retribution. The walk inside seemed to take forever. Our parents were sitting down at the kitchen table when we told them.*

*Then something strange happened. They said “OK” and asked if either of us were hurt. They didn’t yell, scream, blame, or ground us for life, which is what we expected. They even said they would help clean up.*

*I was confused. I expected a punishment the likes of which I had never seen, but instead we cleaned up the broken glass as a family. It still puzzles me, but I guess even when you break a window, you are blessed to be forgiven.”*

What my son Daniel didn’t realize is someone else sitting at the table when he and his brother confessed. That mysterious stranger in our story was present and empowered two parents to be merciful instead of wrathful. Yes, the risen Jesus was in our driveway providing the grace and love we needed to teach what it means to forgive one another and help each other clean up our messes.

### **Sometimes it happens on a driveway, at other times we travel the road to Emmaus when we venture down the Boulevard of Broken Dreams.**

Cleopas and his companion were heart sick and distressed. They loved their Master and entered Jerusalem for his coronation. Instead, they witnessed his crucifixion. The dim hope of resurrection rumors was overwhelmed by the heavy weight of sorrow and despair. Jesus came to Cleopas and his companion on their boulevard of broken dreams. He opened their eyes to the hopeful power of resurrection. That same power and hope is at work today.

Cindy is the Director of Connectional Ministry at Village Presbyterian Church in Kansas City. A few years ago, she shared her boulevard of broken dreams story. It happened when she was 25 years old and was sexually assaulted while on a business trip to Washington, DC. Cindy was grabbed and choked from behind. She thought she was going to die. But she fought back and her assailant ran off injured. His ultimate purpose was unsuccessful, but he left her severely beaten.

*Cindy said, “Some life experiences change us. I walked through a concrete wall that day, the old me on one side and the new me on the other. Maybe you’ve had a “wall” experience in your life. If so, you know there’s no going back. And it takes a long time to get to know the person you’ve become. I blamed myself for a long time. But that was 33 years ago.*

*Looking back, three important things contributed to my ultimate recovery: (1) I never stopped going to church. (2) I had unconditional love from family/friends. (3) I was lucky enough to be introduced to an amazing therapist.*

*Our therapy work was emotionally draining and expensive, but it was a critical investment in my future. I was bound and determined to learn to love myself, unconditionally, as a child of God. I can't pinpoint the exact moment, but it did happen. And I've been at peace ever since. Resurrection is about a new you coming to life. For me, this was resurrection.*

*I've learned that resurrection comes to us in our worst moments. All of us have broken places. Nobody's exempt. But for me, loving and caring for others, and myself, through the love of God, is my best medicine. I can't explain it to you, but I can testify that in...the place of brokenness is the place that Jesus shows up. And in your worst moment, if you seek it, you can find resurrection.*

Cindy traveled the boulevard of broken dreams. Like Cleopas and his companion, she experienced the living and liberating presence of the risen Christ. She might not have recognized it along the way, but Jesus showed up in the guise of her therapist, her family and friends and the Body of Christ.

You and I have been traveling a boulevard of broken dreams this past year. And we're not done moving in that direction. In spite of record number of vaccinations, the Covid infection and hospital rates are increasing with new more transmittable and deadlier variants. We all need to maintain diligence in our safe practices.

Sickness and sorrow, depression and despair, hopelessness and helplessness are still running rampant. An epidemic of gun violence is killing people on a daily basis. And the threat of white supremacy is on display at "White Lives Matter" events today. But we are not without hope, sisters and brothers. The risen Christ is traveling this road with us offering hope, offering life, offering peace, offering love to those who need it the most.

**The road to Emmaus is can be discovered in our driveways and on our boulevard of broken dreams. It's also be discovered on the Circle of Faith and Practice.**

In our story, Jesus comes to troubled travelers and walks with them, he talks with them, he opens the scriptures to them, he shares a meal with them and breaks bread with them. Does any of the sound familiar?

Walking daily with Christ, talking and listening in prayer, reading and studying the bible, sharing meals together, eating and drinking in remembrance of him. In this one story we have most of our faith practices.

Prayer, bible study, hospitality, worship, communion are not just things we do at church. They are holy habits that results in our eyes being opened and our hearts being rekindled into living spiritual flames. They are the means of grace where we experience the presence and reality of God.

Beloved, the table is set and each of us is invited. May our eyes be opened to the presence of the Risen Christ who walks with us on our own Emmaus Road.

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David Whiteley, Pastor  
Jemez Springs Community Presbyterian Church