

19 April 2026
The Third Sunday of Easter, Year A
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Acts 2:14a,36-41

Psalms 116:1-3, 10-17

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Today, we hear another story of expectations turned upside down. On Easter Day, Mary came to the tomb, only to find it empty. Convinced that Jesus' body had been spirited away, she encountered Jesus himself. Last Sunday, we heard of Thomas, who was not so much doubting as he was afraid to believe that Jesus was alive. Then, suddenly there Jesus was. And today, we listen to the story of two people who meet a stranger on the road to Emmaus.

There is always, for us, a certain intensity at walking through the fifty days of the Easter feast with memories of our own expectations being turned upside down. When faced with the collapse of our plans in the face of unfamiliar, painful and sometimes deadly, circumstances – or even just looking at the news – who of us hasn't muttered, "But we had hoped."

Each Easter season, we are invited to hear these stories of disappointed hopes with new ears, and to ask new questions. Where do we look for the Risen Jesus? And, more importantly, where do we discover the Risen Jesus?

The account of the Road to Emmaus is unique to Luke's gospel and is, by far, the longest single resurrection story in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke). New Testament scholar Luke Johnson describes it as "pastoral," carrying the reader out of the chaos of the city into the quiet landscape, the lengthening of the day, and the extended conversation between three travelers. Luke's gentle story bridges the gap between the shocking realities of crucifixion and empty tomb and the fulfillment of Jesus' promises that the apostles would see him again.¹

Most of us know the details of Luke's story: two of Jesus's disciples (one named, one anonymous) telling each other stories about what had happened. A stranger joins them on the road, and the stories continue, all ending with the refrain *we had hoped*. The stranger responds with surprise, gently reframing their interpretation of events about Jesus in the light of the scriptures.

¹ Luke Johnson, *Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina).

When they reach Emmaus, the stranger makes as if to go on but is invited to have a meal with the two disciples. And, in the course of the mealtime rituals of blessing God and breaking bread, they came to realize that the stranger was, in fact, Jesus – who then vanished.

The disciples exclaim to each other, *were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?* I will confess to an inward chuckle at this famous line, imagining a competition about who “knew” first. In any case, they race back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples in the Upper Room the story of *what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

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Luke’s story overflows with images and ideas. This morning, I want to us to think together about three things: Food, Strangers and Stories. So, let’s start with food.

Some Sundays, (at the 10:30) we sing, “the disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread,” recalling today’s Gospel reading. As Episcopalians, we profess a belief in Jesus’ real presence in the Eucharist, but it occurs to me that the Emmaus story has applications beyond the Eucharist alone.

For example, here at Trinity we know a great deal about the gift of food. Our kitchen and the South Parish Hall are busy four days a week, not to mention the good work of DSA. But our food ministry is about more than putting food in people’s stomachs, as important as that is. Food is never a one-way street; it is always mutual. Both those who eat and those who prepare receive blessings. Food is the foundation of community – Sunday Hot Lunch, Wednesday Café, our Pantries, Coffee Hour and Monthly Breakfasts after the 8am Eucharist.

This week, I’ve been thinking about where we were six years ago. Most of our churches had closed, and celebrations of the Eucharist became rare. But the early days of the pandemic also threw a wrench into the ways many of us dealt with food.

Before the days of “safer at home,” I had come to rely on others to prepare what I ate. I had a favorite diner, with favorite items on the menu. Or I’d wander the prepared foods section at the grocery, looking for something to reheat. Besides cereal or eggs in the morning, I rarely prepared actual food.

With COVID, everything changed. I started paying attention to actual food. I learned to get creative about using what I had in the house. Did I really need to go to the store? The answer was usually no. And Google gave me lots of ideas about what to do with that dried up thing in the vegetable drawer.

But, over time, complete with botched and burned attempts, and dashed hopes, I found a great blessing and a deep peace in choosing, preparing, waiting for and eating

the fruits of God's creation. In every onion, every chicken breast, every can of beans and pot of rice, I was gifted with a glimpse of God's presence and God's blessing.

That evening at Emmaus, Jesus' actions at table – taking, blessing, breaking and giving – were familiar, and clearly connect to earlier feeding stories in the Gospels, but Luke tells us that it is the breaking of the bread that was the key to them, at last, recognizing Jesus. To borrow from e.e. cummings:

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)²

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Now, let's think about encountering strangers. Not long before I left Indiana, within a period of a month I found myself on the shoulder of Interstate 69 waiting for a tow truck. Both times, there were important gatherings that I "needed" to attend. We had hoped, indeed! But, there I was, twice, stuck and frustrated on the road to nowhere, when two exceedingly kind tow truck drivers came to my assistance. Just that would make a fine Good Samaritan sermon, but there's more.

These two chaps were not folks I would encounter on a typical day. To be honest, there were times in my life when I would have looked down my nose at them, a reaction certainly driven by fear. Somehow, in both cases, I managed to lay aside any sense of defensiveness or entitlement. I was able to be curious about who these guys were, where they grew up, what their families were like.

I learned about the wonders of growing up in a small town in rural Brown County, and about having the run of the fields just south of Muncie. I learned why they love their work, and their hopes for their children. In turn, they learned something about this particular priest whose car wasn't long for this world.

It wasn't exactly opening the Scriptures, and there was no bread involved, but I know my heart was warmed by the grace of God in the meeting of strangers, each learning from the other, each discovering the others' humanity.

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Third, about stories. It gives me great hope to realize that it takes time (often a lot of time) to be able to recognize Jesus. Nobody in the scriptures got it right the first time; why do we think that we can, or should?

New life, especially resurrection life, is rarely smooth, it comes in fits and starts, with many dashed hopes and growing pains along the way. On top of that, Jesus is

² *i thank You God for most this amazing* by e.e. cummings (1894-1962).

often not in the place where we think he should be. The point is that Jesus IS there, where Jesus is, patiently waiting for you and me. This is why stories are essential to our life of faith.

The Emmaus story reminds us that God's presence and blessing are revealed in the small, common activities of our lives: a quiet walk or a simple meal; a ride in a tow truck, or two; the rhythms and rituals of our seemingly ordinary days. Jesus is here with us on our road.

If the Emmaus story tells us anything, it tells us that the risen Christ is not hampered in any way by the bumpiness of our road, or our ruined expectations, or the seeming smallness of our lives. In the depths of their sorrow, Cleopas and his nameless companion invited a stranger to dinner, encountered the Risen Jesus, and then told others the story of the breaking of the bread.

On Friday evening here at Trinity, or on Saturday morning at the Cathedral, come share stories about the remarkable ministry of Deacon Barbi Click, who taught us so much about the gift of welcoming the stranger with food, and the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst.

The story that begins one evening in Emmaus continues to be written today. Wherever and whenever we make room for strangers at our table, or at the altar table, or at a table in the South Parish Hall, or at the table of our hearts, Jesus comes to us.

But we had hoped. Of course we had. Of course we do. And yet, the stranger who is Jesus still walks with us on our journey; Jesus still warms our hearts as he reveals himself to us in Holy Scripture; Jesus still makes himself known to us in the breaking of the bread.

So, my friends, keep hoping, keep walking, keep feasting, keep looking for Jesus in places you've never imagined going and in people you've never imagined meeting. Then, keep telling the stories of your risen life. Christ is *still* risen. Alleluia. He is *still* risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.