



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### Encounters with Jesus: The Emmaus Travelers

Luke 24:13-35, 36-49

For a long time growing up, I thought “I could never be a witness for my Christian faith,” because nothing spectacular ever happened to me. Even the first few times my fraternity brothers started asking me what I was thinking of doing after graduation, I told them “I’m going to grad school.” I didn’t want to have to explain “I’m going to seminary.” Here’s why: I was never struck down by lightning. I never had what I would have considered a “Close Encounter with Jesus” of any kind. Paul was struck by a great light and blinded on the Road to Damascus. The certain man on the Road to Jericho was rescued by the Good Samaritan. Simon of Cyrene encountered Jesus on the Road to Golgotha when he had to carry the cross. Mary, on the road to the tomb, met Jesus, even though she thought he was the gardener at first. But me? I’d never been rescued from death’s door. I’d never seen God, or so I thought. I was a pasty white suburban kid from a pretty neat family. I got teased by my brother and sisters, shoved through milk chutes to unlock doors, and always had to sit on the hump in the middle of the back seat. Even though I’d grown up in church, I thought “I don’t have much to say about God.” Maybe you too don’t have confidence in your encounter with Jesus. If that’s you (and me) this morning, hear the account of the Emmaus travelers, as they are leaving Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection...

*13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. 28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

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- “Two of them” refers back to “the eleven and all the rest.” Sort of like the Professor and Mary Ann on Gilligan’s Island. I think I find that comforting, knowing that Jesus had close encounters with all kinds of people, and maybe it’s not so bad to be part of “the rest.”
- They are going to a village called Emmaus. It was likely their home.
- (Buechner writes) Emmaus is where we go, where these two went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life. I think all of us have an Emmaus eventually. Where is your Emmaus? Where you don’t have to think about how lousy life in this world can be? Maybe it’s the mall. Maybe it’s a bar. Maybe it’s the movies, or TV, or the internet. We try to escape, but our troubles are still there, like the sky, extending over everything, and we finally know there IS no escape. (Why? Why can’t we see there is no escape?)

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- Now this is ironic! Cleopas assumes that Jesus is the only person in Jerusalem who doesn’t know what’s just happened! When in fact, Jesus is the only person who truly understands these events. How often we in the know assume we know the way things are, only to be wrong again. We think we’re doing stuff for God, when really God is doing stuff and we’re a part of His story.
- Cleopas neatly summarizes the Gospel for this stranger. Cleopas and others had hoped Jesus was the one to rescue them. But their hope was gone.
- It is now the third day. Each day deepened the disciples’ despair. People who have lost a loved one talk about how the days after the funeral are the most lost and hopeless.

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- Jesus said “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe!” Ouch. That is SO encouraging to me. Jesus *isn’t* calling them fools. *His* target is their *unbelief*. We love to excuse unbelief. We claim sympathy for unbelief, but Jesus treats their unbelief very seriously. As honest and understandable as it is, let us not readily excuse ourselves for mistrust of God! If you are seeking, or if you are a believer, realize God says you can save yourself a lot of trouble if you’d try trusting him.
- When my kids feel sad I’m sympathetic, but if they’re sad because they won’t think through a problem, my sympathy changes. If one of them is sad because they want a toy, but won’t walk over and get it, it would be inappropriate for me to just hand it to them! I wish they could see a little thought and consideration can often prevent a lot of sadness, doubt, and pain! (I wish we all could see that).
- The truth is, God has given us everything we need for salvation, life eternal, and life today. It’s like the toy across the room: available if we choose to walk over and get it.
- Jesus explains the witness of the Scriptures to the Emmaus travelers. There is no replacement for Scripture. No matter what road you’re on, if you and I read the promises of God in Scripture

more and read our long list of troubles less, we would see things differently! We'd rather run to Emmaus and focus exclusively on our feelings and ourselves. Jesus says "Think Dummy!" (He says it in a loving way). Don't forget the words of your heavenly Father, of Jesus the Savior, or of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus calls the Comforter. Think of God's plan, his unchanging love, his power, his faithfulness, his mercy. Think of his promises, and as you do, you will be transformed.

- God's ways are not our ways. God chose the foolishness of the cross, because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength (1 Cor. 1:25).
- The Scriptures are still a powerful way for revealing Christ, no lightening bolt batteries required. You can be guided and strengthened by the Bible!

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- The fellowship and discussion of the Bible prepares us to see Jesus. The power of Christ in their midst opens their eyes. Hospitality and fellowship are vital. Jesus wouldn't have stayed with them unless they insisted. He never forces himself on you. He allows you to invite him in. Then, Jesus the guest of the group, becomes Jesus the Host at the table—just like Holy Communion.
- Hospitality breaks down walls. It eliminates any we/they thinking. You will never know...you will never know what blessings you might receive by giving hospitality. You will never know what blessings you might lose by foregoing it.
- John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in the 1700's, never wanted to begin a denomination. He wanted to strengthen the Church of England, by adding study and fellowship. He and George Whitfield preached about the same. For a couple decades, Whitfield's followers outnumbered Wesley's. But Wesley never preached unless he could establish classes, so people would read scripture and fellowship. There is no organization that can trace their roots to Whitfield, but there are 70 million in the Methodist Movement worldwide. The present small group movement across our country that is reviving Christianity is simply an extension of the early Methodist movement. The class meeting small groups of the 1700s were simply an extension of the fellowship and Bible study of the Emmaus travelers and a reflection of what the early church looked like. Many of us, on our road to Emmaus, need to be a part of a group too.
- And "*their hearts were burning*". Hindsight is not glamorous, but hindsight, combined with fellowship, hospitality, and Bible study, is often how we come to faith and freedom for living. I can honestly say my faith has grown and I've grown as a person more as a result of time with small, growth groups, than from any other source. Christ seems to show up!

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Here is something very revealing. In a sense, that first Easter ended with what could be called a Bible study or Growth Group. That's a fiercely quiet way to end a day that changed the world forever. Yet there is something powerful about the fact that even that cosmos-shattering day ended like a Bible study session, encouraging one another in a deepening relationship with Christ, fellowship, caring for one another, bringing others into their community, and raising up leaders who would change the world.