

God in the Ordinary
Luke 24:13-25
April 23, 2023

As many of you know, I grew up near the Lakes of Minneapolis. I have walked around Lake Harriet, a 3-mile walk, probably thousands of times. When I go back to Minneapolis to visit, one of the first things I do is call a friend and say, "I'm in town. Let's walk around the lake."

Of course, the walk is for exercise. But it is also therapeutic as my friend and I talk about everything. We catch up on our lives. We share joys and concerns and struggles. No topic is off-limits. That is how it goes on a long walk with a friend.

Our scripture passage today is about what happens on a long walk between friends.

As we prepare to read the scriptures, let us begin with pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read Luke 24:13-35

The walk begins with two followers of Jesus who are leaving Jerusalem. They are talking about the events that just happened: the crucifixion of Jesus. They've heard the rumors: Jesus is alive. All four gospels record that no one believes the women when they report Jesus has risen. Even Jesus' closest disciples do not believe it. The word that is used for the women's story translated "idle tale" or "nonsense" actually means delirious. These women must be out of their mind. Because, as one commentator said (Dave Lose): "the earth is unwilling to cough up the dead." Resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion.

So these two followers of Jesus head back home to Emmaus. There is nothing in Jerusalem for them anymore. They had hoped, they said.

Of course, we know what happens. A stranger (to them, not us) joins them in their walk and discussion. The stranger pretends not to know what the two followers are talking about. So, they tell this stranger about Jesus, his death, the rumors. We had hoped, they said, that he was one to redeem Israel.

This is for you grammar lovers. The statement “we had hoped” is called the present imperfect verb tense. It means something happened repeatedly in the past, but it no longer happens in the present. Thus, it is called the present imperfect. The point is these two followers are not hoping anymore. We had hoped, their faces downcast.

We’ve all been there. A dream did not materialize. A promise proved to be false. The future is closed off. You have no more enthusiasm for anymore possibilities because you can’t bear to be disappointed again. So, our two followers are leaving town. We had hoped.

So, we settle here for a moment. Our story begins with broken hearts. Before any resurrection there is a cross. Before burning hearts there are broken ones. We had hoped.

Then in the midst of the broken hearts, the Risen Christ comes along walking down the road. Jesus hears their dashed hopes, their broken hearts. And Jesus throws them a curveball. He plays along. Why didn’t Jesus say to them what he said to the women: “Do not be afraid! Fear not. It is I! Jesus. The rumors are true.”

Instead, Jesus gently chides them: You are foolish, little ones. We need to do some serious Bible Study, Jesus told them. Remember Moses? It is all about hope in the most improbable circumstances. On and on, Jesus shows them from the scriptures how the Messiah was to suffer.

All of this on a road. The risen Jesus in the midst of a walk, an ordinary part of our lives.

Luke ends his Gospel with this chapter, but he will go on to write the Book of Acts. Many great events happen out on the road in the book of Acts. A disciple named Phillip meets a eunuch traveling on a road, and the eunuch is the first foreigner to be baptized in Jesus’ name. Saul is on the road to Damascus and meets the Risen Christ. From that encounter, Saul becomes the great Apostle Paul and becomes a world traveler introducing people to Jesus on the road.

As of yet, the two followers do not recognize Jesus in their walk. As they approach Emmaus, the followers invite Jesus to stay with them for the night. Hospitality is extended and dinner is served.

When you think of Jesus, what activity of Jesus characterizes him the most for you? Perhaps it is healing the sick with the touch of his hands, or healing with just his words. Or, maybe Jesus' preaching to a crowd resonates with you. Or, his compassion for women. For some, it is Jesus on the cross. Or, exalted at the right hand of God.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is the most Jesus at a meal. Meals with Jesus were significant because of the kind of people gathered around the food. Jesus was there with not just his disciples, but sinners and tax collectors of the day, and at times, the most powerful people of the day. Even prostitutes showed up. Jesus dined with them all.

In fact, Jesus was so often eating with people that he was called a glutton and a drunkard (7:34). Remember Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine. He wanted to make sure the new couple had enough wine for the wedding and the eating.

As Jesus prepares to eat with his companions – Jesus doing the most Jesus thing of all – everything changes. Jesus takes the bread, breaks it, and gives it to them. It is in this moment at a meal that they recognize him. It is not in his teaching (although their hearts burned within them as Jesus taught them on the road). It wasn't his presence because they didn't recognize him for quite a while. It was his sharing bread with his friends. It is in the meal that they realize that Jesus was with them the whole time.

The Resurrection is anchored with the real world. Real people eat. Jesus eats. The resurrected Messiah joins his followers in one of the most earthy and everyday activities. I can imagine Jesus was hungry after being in the tomb for three days.

Jesus is in our meals. We didn't read the next section, but the two followers immediately return to Jerusalem to find the disciples and tell them what happened. "It is true!" Jesus suddenly appears in their midst, and after reassuring them he is Jesus, says, "Do you have anything to eat?"

As a single person, I eat most of my meals alone. I have done it a long time and I am used to it. But I cherish the moments of going to someone's home. We gather together at the table, hold hands, and acknowledge the presence of Christ with us as we prepare to break bread together. It is a most holy moment.

One pastor said, "The dinner table is the Lord's cathedral. It is in the saying of table blessings and the breaking of bread with one another that a meal with Jesus is celebrated, and his resurrected presence is experienced."

The simple act of sitting down around a table, of a shared supper, is a vital aspect of our spiritual life. It happens often in the Christian life: the regular meal with family and friends, the Lord's Supper on Communion Sunday, and at table at the great banquet in the kingdom of God.

I want you to turn to the picture on the front of your bulletin. It is a painting called *The Kitchen Maid* by Velazquez (vuh-la-skez). Velazquez lived in the early to mid 1600s. This painting hangs in the National Gallery of Ireland.

As you think about the meal Jesus and his companions ate that night, someone had to prepare and cook it. There had to have been a woman behind the scenes for this dinner at Emmaus. There she is imagined in this painting. While the men speak of spiritual matters, she's hard at work in the kitchen preparing dinner for them.

The maid is visibly distracted. In her left hand she holds a ceramic jug of wine. She's glancing over her right shoulder, clearly eavesdropping on the backroom conversation. Do you see them? The men? They are in the upper lefthand corner of the painting, in the background. You can barely see them. Perhaps you didn't notice them until now.

The maid is listening in on their conversation. As she does so, she bends over to support herself. She's in a state of disbelief because she realizes the man she's serving. The maid recognized the risen Christ while working in the context of a kitchen. "God is found in the pots," said Teresa of Avila.

In the pots. At a meal. On the road. In a conversation. God in the ordinary. The risen Jesus is always right in the midst of us. And we would not want it any other way. Amen.

The song we are going to sing is new. It is based on our scripture passage. If you cannot catch the tune, at least pay attention to the words: that Christ walks with us and eats with us. Jamie will play it through once. Please stand.