

The Long Road That Leads to the Table

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Luke 24:13–35 NRSVUE

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Have you ever found yourself in a moment where you thought you knew exactly how your life story was supposed to go—until it didn't? Sometimes it happens in dramatic, movie-like ways. More often, it happens quietly. A relationship you thought would last, ends.

A career path shifts in a way you never expected. A sickness arrives and changes everything. Maybe it happens in family life. You imagine raising your children a certain way, and suddenly you find yourself navigating choices and realities you never prepared for. One day you are watching them take their first steps, and before you know it, you are watching them make decisions that are painful and hard to understand.

Maybe you are caring for aging parents, and life feels very different than it once did.

There may even be some here this morning—(and you do not need to raise your hand) — who are Leafs fans! You once had hope, maybe even earlier this season, that this would finally be the year. And once again, disappointment. I am not a Leafs fan myself, but I imagine it is a deeply spiritual exercise in suffering.

Whatever your "new territory" looks like—whatever the disorientation is—there is often this quiet thought beneath it all: *"This is not what I thought life would look like. So now what?"*

When life becomes unfamiliar, it can feel like a long walk away from what once was. And that feeling is not only personal. It can also be true for the Church.

Many people sense that something has shifted. The kind of cultural influence or clarity the Church once seemed to have is not what it used to be. We are trying to make sense of what faithfulness to Jesus looks like now.

Many of us are walking away from what felt familiar—sometimes by choice, sometimes because we have no other option. But if the Easter story tells us anything—and remember, friends, we are still in Eastertide—it tells us this:

Sometimes the long road away from what once was, with all its confusion, heartbreak, doubt, and disillusionment, is actually the road that leads us somewhere deeper. Why? Because it is often on that road that Christ meets us.

Sometimes the road that feels like disappointment is the very road where Jesus draws near, leads us to his table, and changes everything. Two weeks after Easter, it is worth asking: how are we actually doing? How are you doing? How is the world doing?

Because if we are honest, even though we celebrated the resurrection just two weeks ago, our lives and our world do not always look very resurrected. They do not always feel full of new creation.

That is exactly where we meet the two disciples in Luke 24. They are walking away from Jerusalem—away from hope, away from expectation, away from everything they thought Jesus was going to be.

They are not celebrating resurrection. They are processing disappointment. They had expected a Messiah who would conquer — a king who would defeat enemies. Someone who would overthrow Rome, restore power, and place them back at the center of society.

Instead, they got a crucified Messiah. A failed movement.

Yes, some women had returned from the tomb claiming he was alive. But as they looked around, nothing seemed to have changed. They thought they were on the path of victory, and now they no longer knew what to believe. So they began the long walk home carrying what can only be described as soul-crushing disappointment. And this is where the story presses in on us—not only as individuals, but as the Church.

In many ways, the Church in North America is walking the same road.

For generations, the Church occupied a place of cultural influence. There was a vision—sometimes spoken, sometimes assumed—that we could build a kind of Christian society where faith shaped the center of public life. That vision is fading. Maybe it has already faded. Some people deny it. Some celebrate it. Some spend their time trying to decide who to blame. Others quietly carry the grief of it.

Maybe what we are experiencing is this:

The Church is on the Emmaus road. Confused. Disappointed. Trying to make sense of a story we thought we understood. And perhaps, like those first disciples, some of us were expecting the wrong kind of kingdom. A kingdom of power. A kingdom of influence. A kingdom that wins. A Christianity at the center. A faith of domination. A version of love that is often just fear and hostility underneath.

But Jesus came bringing something entirely different. He invites—actually commands—his followers to walk a different path: enemy-embracing, radically forgiving, self-giving, other-oriented love.

And here is the good news: Jesus does not wait to meet us once we have figured everything out. He does not wait until our faith feels strong again. *He meets us on the road.*

Christ comes alongside those disciples in the middle of their confusion. He listens. He lets them speak. And then, gently, he begins to reframe everything.

He shows them that what looked like failure was actually the very way God was working all along. The cross—the symbol of Rome’s victory—was actually its defeat. Sin, death, and the powers of evil were not triumphant there — they were being undone. The cross was not an unfortunate detour on the way to victory. **The cross was the way.** The cross was the way of Jesus. And the cross is the way for those who follow him. As Greg Boyd puts it:

“The kingdom of God doesn’t advance by coercion or force, but by cruciform love—a love shaped by the cross, a love that gives of itself rather than grasping for power.”

That kind of love cannot remain abstract. It must take on flesh in the lives of those who claim to follow Jesus. This is one of the things I am deeply grateful for in the Anabaptist tradition. Since its beginnings in the 16th century, it has held tightly to this truth.

Early Anabaptist leader Menno Simons wrote: *“True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. It clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it binds up what is wounded.”*

For the Anabaptists, following Jesus was never about controlling the world. It was about embodying the way of Jesus within it.

And for those of us who struggle with the word “evangelical,” I understand. But I love remembering that “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*—which simply means “good news.” Evangelical should look like justice, righteousness, and the fruits of love—not political partisanship or the pursuit of power.

Because when our faith becomes shaped more by empire than by the cross, we begin expecting the wrong kind of kingdom — just like those first disciples did. *“We had hoped...”* That may be one of the saddest lines in all of Scripture. And maybe it is one many of us know well. Because if following Jesus truly means being shaped by the cross—by self-giving love rather than power—then it means we do not need to hold onto power to be faithful.

Which raises a deeper question:

If we are not defined by power, then how should we see ourselves in the world? Scripture gives us a word - *Exiles*. In 1 Peter, the apostle describes followers of Jesus as temporary residents—people in exile. Not because we withdraw from the world, but because our deepest allegiance belongs somewhere else. We were never meant to place our hope in cultural dominance, political control, or empire. We are meant to be a people whose allegiance belongs to Christ.

We plant ourselves in our communities. We work for the good, for the peace, for the flourishing of our neighbours. But we take our marching orders from Jesus, not from the surrounding culture. And this frees us! It frees us from fear. It frees us from needing to win. It frees us from placing our ultimate hope in things that cannot carry it. And what does that freedom look like?

Peter says: *“Love one another deeply from the heart.”*

Not sentimental love. Not polite niceness. Not “I love puppies and rainbows” kind of love! This is rugged love. Costly love. The kind of love that stays when it would be easier to leave. The kind of love that shows up, that stretches us, and remains present to one another in times of need. This is love that looks like Jesus.

And this is what resurrection makes possible. Because resurrection is not just the claim that Jesus is no longer dead. It is the claim that his life is now given to us.

As Paul the Apostle writes in 2 Corinthians:

“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.” To belong to Christ is to live and love like Jesus. And as apprentices of Jesus, we learn—with the Spirit’s help—to show up in the world in a peculiar way — we show up in love. Not agreement. Not uniformity. Not having everything figured out. But deep, sincere, costly love that holds us together.

This is why I love moments like this—where different Christian traditions can gather together. Anabaptist and United. Different convictions, different practices, even real disagreements.

Yes, we have our distinctives. For example, baptism. *“You baptize infants as well as those who come to faith later in life, trusting that God’s grace meets us before we can even respond. It is beautiful. We Anabaptists tend to wait until someone can say yes without a pacifier. Different practices. Different theological emphases!”*

And yes, we may even think we are right.

But humility reminds us that it is still the same grace at work. Unity does not come from being the same. It comes from staying at the table of Jesus, and choosing relationship over being right. From refusing to let differences become divisions.

In a world bent on pulling people apart—through politics, outrage, and algorithms—the Church becomes a witness when we remain together. Because the Church is not held together by agreement on everything. We are held together by moving toward the same center: Jesus. And that brings us back to Emmaus.

The moment everything changes for those disciples is not on the road. It is at the table. Jesus takes bread. He blesses it. He breaks it. He gives it. And suddenly, they see! Their eyes are opened! They realize that even in their confusion, even in their disappointment, Jesus had been with them all along.

So maybe that is where some of us are today. On a long road. A road away from what once was. But it is not a road into nothing. It is a road that leads to the table. To Christ's presence. To one another. To a deeper kind of love. A love that holds us together and sends us out together. As Ron Sider said:

"The gospel of the kingdom calls us into a radical way of life—where love and justice are not just ideas we agree with, but realities we live out together."

We are called to embody peace. To pursue justice. To live as exiles. To take our marching orders from Jesus. To reflect the crucified and risen Christ in the world.

Amen