

## The Journey

Have you been on a road trip lately? Are you planning to go on a road trip soon? In this beautiful springtime, maybe you're dreaming of traveling up to the mountains or down to the beach.

We live in a society of travelers. We live among a people on the move. A people who take all kinds of trips. Business trips. Family visits. Romantic getaways. Vacations. Usually we go by car or plane. Or we might hop on a train or a bus. Or a boat—or a bike. Sometimes we even walk. Walking is one of the least expensive modes of transportation. It's also one of the most healthful means of exercise.

But today I'd like to reflect with you on another kind of walk. Another kind of journey. It's a journey which you've already begun. Maybe you set out on it a long time ago.

On your journey, you may have a companion: a good friend, a family member, a spouse. As you walk, you're in conversation. In dialogue. You talk about things you don't understand. About the way the world works and about why things happen the way they do. About death and taxes. About floods and tornadoes.

About economic systems and oppressive structures and their effects on hurting people. About shootings. About war. About brokenness. About the despondency you experience when it feels as though things will always be the way they are now. About how it seems that there is no hope of deliverance.

Then, at some point on your journey, you sense the presence of another traveler. You hear another set of footsteps. Another voice. There are three of you now, not just two. But you don't recognize this One who's joined you. This One who asks you what you're talking about.

The odd thing is, the moment when this stranger joins you is precisely when your spirits are at their lowest. Is it only a coincidence that he appears at the time when grief has overwhelmed you? At the time when disappointment has immobilized you? At the time when despair has kept you from moving forward? When all you can do is stand still, sadly saying those most poignant words: *I had hoped. I had hoped.* Because you believe your hopes are dashed. It feels as though your dreams are dead.

And this One who's walking with you—you tell him how you feel. You share your deepest disillusionment: that even

though others have told you that Jesus who was crucified has been raised from the dead, they have not seen him. They haven't really experienced him. And neither have you.

Oh, you've read the words of sacred scripture. Maybe you've read them over and over again. But at times, maybe they seemed to be just so many words on a page. Maybe they didn't seem to hold any life-giving meaning. Or any life-changing message.

That is, until this stranger who's with you on your journey begins to speak to you through the scriptures. Helping you to grow in the understanding that the scriptures—the books of Moses, the prophets, and all the rest—point to the One in whom they are fulfilled. And as the word is opened up to you, you find that you are no longer at a standstill. You find that you can—once again—be on your way.

And you move on down the road. You keep learning more. But eventually, you realize that much of your journey is behind you. It's late in the day. And it's getting on toward evening.

So you ask this fellow-traveler to stay with you. Do you ask out of concern for him, for his well-being? Or perhaps in the hope of entertaining an angel unaware? Or could it be because

you want to hear more? It might be because, when he's with you, you feel somehow sheltered and comforted. Maybe the yearning to have him stay with you is one you can't even explain.

Whatever the reason, you offer hospitality to this stranger.

First-century people and first-century communities are all about extending hospitality. It's what they do. And they model hospitality for us who are the twenty-first century church. We are to be the church of open doors. The church that doesn't place limits on who can enter into its worship and its celebrations. The church that doesn't limit its celebration of Easter to just one Sunday. Easter is a season. But it isn't *just* a season! The truth is that Easter is for always. It's still Easter!

In the gospel account we read today, it's still the day of resurrection. On this day, according to Luke, that master storyteller, two followers of Jesus trudge along the road to Emmaus. One of them is Cleopas.

Have you ever wondered about the *other* disciple on that road? Some have speculated that this companion could have been a close friend of Cleopas. Or a family member. Or even a spouse. Luke doesn't tell us whether this other person is male or female. And Luke doesn't tell us this other disciple's name.

This is a narrative that you and I have read many times. It took me a while to figure out why we're not given the name of this other disciple. I think the reason is that Luke wants you to see *yourself* in this story. Could it be that Luke intends for you to put in your *own* name as the one who journeys with Cleopas? To understand that *you* are the other disciple, one of these two who are joined by a stranger?

On a long and winding road. A road that leads to Emmaus. Now, Emmaus might not be your final destination. In fact, it probably isn't. Emmaus might be where you go to try to make sense of events you've heard about but wish you hadn't. Emmaus might be where you go in an attempt to escape from all that's happening in this fallen world. Emmaus might be a retreat. A rest along the way.

Where is *your* Emmaus? Could it be a physical place?

Whatever or wherever it is, your Emmaus is a place where you remember the One who has journeyed with you. When this One offered you an understanding of God's enduring word, your heart was strangely warmed. Your heart burned within you. Then you remember that Jesus said he would bring fire to the earth. And on your journey, that fire has begun to be kindled in you.

And the One who has walked with you stays with you. As your guest. Your Emmaus is a place where, wondrously, your guest becomes your host.

Your Emmaus is a place where your host takes bread and blesses it and breaks it and gives it to you.

Your Emmaus is a place where you again notice these four familiar gestures that are embedded in the recesses of memory. For he who makes them is the very One who has taken a few loaves and blessed and broken and given them, and five thousand were fed. This is the very One who, at a last supper with his closest friends, has reached for the bread. And in a way that is his alone, he has taken it and blessed it and broken it and given it to them.

Your Emmaus is a place where, in a moment that evokes the intimacy of that supper, you're somehow enabled to see that which, earlier, you could not see.

Your Emmaus is a place where your eyes get opened and—finally—the identity of this One who's been with you all along is revealed to you. Revealed as the One into whose likeness you are growing. Revealed—for your sake—as the One in whom your hope lives, and always will.

Your Emmaus is a place where it becomes clear to you that you have to continue on your journey. You have to go. You can't *not* go. You have to go quickly and share with others the amazing good news about the One who's been with you on all the roads you've traveled. About the One you recognize at a holy meal.

And today, beloved, this One, this Jesus who has journeyed with you, invites you to an Emmaus place. Invites you to share table fellowship with him. Invites you to receive the bread—which is his body—that is taken and blessed and broken for you and given to you.

Invites you to experience his mysterious but very real presence. Invites you to be filled with the presence of your risen Lord, who is at last made known to you—whose measureless grace and whose everlasting love are made known to you—in the breaking of the bread.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.