

## ***“Mystery Guest, Heavenly Hosts”***

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Decatur,  
Georgia

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Holy Scriptures: Luke 24: 13-35

### *The Walk to Emmaus*

<sup>13</sup> Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup> and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup> While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup> but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup> And he said to them, **“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”** They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup> 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?” <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> Then he said to them, **“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!** <sup>26</sup>

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" <sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup> 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?" <sup>33</sup> That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup> They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" <sup>35</sup> Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

## **The Way**

The late Saul Alinsky was teaching a group of community organizers that in order to effectively communicate, they had to stay within the experience of their listeners.

He was teaching, but all the faces in the room had a vacant, dull stare.

They had either no clue or no interest in what he was saying.

Finally he said, *“Everybody stand up and follow me around the block.*

*I am going to try to give away this \$20 bill.*

*Stay 30 feet behind me and watch what happens.”*

Once outside he approached a man and offered him the twenty.

The man said, *“What do you think I am, a fool?”* and hurried off.

Alinsky approached a woman and she just about slapped him.

*“I am not that kind of woman!”* she exclaimed.

All the way around the block he offered people money,

and not one person accepted it.

The concept was outside of their experience.

When they got back in the classroom people’s eyes were lit up.

*“I see!”* they said. *“We have to connect where people are, in their own context.”*

Saul Alinsky learned from some of the world’s finest communicators:

Moses and the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth.

Start where people are on their journey.

Give people room to maneuver and take in new information.

Imitate Christ.

You will recognize the presence of God along the way when you act Christ-like.

When you do, then all the pieces will start to fall together.

When you do, you will never be the same, and angels in heaven will rejoice.

When you do, you will have a story to tell.

Consider the story of the Walk to Emmaus.

Consider what happened on the way.

In Luke 24, after the crucifixion two disciples were heading out of town

as fast as their legs would carry them

when they met the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus.

We know that one of them was named Cleopas.

Listen again as Luke sets the scene:

*“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.”*

That is the road each of us gets to walk.

The road to Emmaus is the way.

That was the first name for the church: The Way.

The church, when it is half true to its promise,

is a community of faithful people

amongst whom we gain a glimpse into the mystery of  
the Living Christ.

The risen Christ meets us wherever we are, no matter our state of  
mind,

makes himself known in the unpacking of the Word

and the breaking of the bread,

and suddenly, mysteriously vanishes,

leaving us to tell our story.

Disciples of Christ are entrusted with believing whether we have seen  
or not.

We are commissioned to be heavenly hosts for whomever God sends  
to be the guest.

As the disciples learned firsthand, the mystery guest could be Christ  
himself.

What a glorious tale we have to tell!

The Bible says:

*“While they were talking and discussing,*

*Jesus himself came near and went with them,*

*but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”*

Get out of town! They didn't know Jesus?

These are two of his closest friends.

It had only been three days since they had dinner with him,

since they went with Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane

singing psalms and praying, and then witnessing his arrest.

Now, on the afternoon of the first Easter,

as they slip away from Jerusalem, they don't know him.

The Bible says, *“Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”*

A single mother of three teenagers grew weary

of continually stocking the fridge

only to have her children raid the ice box every night.

She posted a large sign on the fridge door that read: *God Sees You!*

When Granny came for a visit she added a postscript in neat handwriting:

*“Every time you read these words,*

*remember that God loves you so much*

*that the Living Christ cannot take his eyes off you!”*

Two followers of Jesus are trudging along the dusty road  
seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus  
when suddenly the risen Christ joins them incognito on their  
journey.

The Living Christ could not take his eyes off the disciples,  
and yet they could not see him.

Were they blinded because they thought he was dead and gone,  
and that death has the last word?

Were they blinded by death, believing that the world is closed and  
shut?

The risen Christ is to them a stranger.

This is one of the mysteries of the faith we cherish.

Remember that Mary saw the risen Christ, but thought he was a  
gardener.

Recall the time disciples in a boat saw Christ walking toward them on  
the water,

yet at first they did not recognize him.

Now here we have two disciples who had been with Christ not three  
days earlier

encounter Jesus on the way to Emmaus,

yet they do not recognize him.

Sometimes it takes a second look.

Sometimes it takes hearing God say your name.

Sometimes it takes moving from knowing about Jesus to knowing Jesus.

This certainly parallels my own faith journey on the way.

For my first decade and a half I learned all about Jesus in church,

learned the hymns and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm,

learned the rituals and loved the fellowship,

yet it wasn't until I experienced the forgiving  
grace of God

through the people of God

that I came to know Jesus.

Sometimes believing in the unseen

takes a second look, a fresh perspective, an open mind,

an appreciation for unsolved mysteries.

On the Way to Emmaus the disciples speak with Jesus

of the events that have just passed,

and he opens for them the Holy Scriptures,

teaching them how the Son of God

must die and rise in order to fulfill the  
Word of God.



*“As they came near the village to which they were going,  
Jesus 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.” (vs. 28-29)*

“Don’t go!” they said to the stranger. “We need you to stay in our lives a bit longer”

After Jesus unpacked the Word

their response was to issue an invitation, to extend an act of hospitality.

The Holy Spirit is at work in them

even though they may not know it or know how.

*“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.” (vs. 31-32)*

The mystery was solved in the breaking of the bread.

The solution is mystified when Jesus vanishes from their sight.

The mysterious guest had become the heavenly host.

Christ as Host invites those partaking of holy communion  
to be like him, to become heavenly hosts.

Until and because we extend heavenly hospitality,  
we will not recognize the face of God in our midst.

He can walk with us and talk with us all day and all night,  
yet until we take his teachings into our hearts and practice  
them in community,

Jesus will continue to seem like such a mystery.

Start to practice hospitality, and suddenly, happily, thankfully  
the Living Christ seems a lot clearer and closer.

Practice hospitality to the lost, the last, and the least.

Practice hospitality with the broke and the broken.

Practice hospitality with the mothers and the motherless.

This is the Way.

Jesus vanishes because they no longer need his physical presence.

They will know and remember forever  
that God is not dead!

God is alive and at work. God is nigh.

*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?”*

In that moment of recognition and acceptance of the love of Christ

they start to move from discouragement and despair toward hope and faith.

So, instead of spending the night in a safe place, in a sacred space,

they choose to walk back to Jerusalem in the dark!

They walk seven miles back into the danger zone,

back to the city they had fled for fear of their very lives.

Now they go back to share the good news with others.

Now they go back to take a stand for what is right and true.

Now they return with a story to tell of what happened to them on the way.

They are sustained by the unpacking of the Word of God,

by the mighty presence of Christ in their lives, walking beside them,

and by the Bread of Life and the Cup of the New Covenant.

Cleopas and his friend are filled with a courage and hope

they didn't know they had earlier.

The Way is paved with love.

God loves you.

The way of God is grounded in love.

Love works.

Start where people are on their journey.

Give people room to maneuver and take in new information.

You will recognize the presence of God along the way when you act Christ-like.

Imitate Christ on the Way.

When you do, then all the pieces will start to fall together.

When you do, you will never be the same, and angels in heaven will rejoice.

When you do, you will have a story to tell.

Barbara Brown Taylor tells her story

of her nephew Will's first birthday party.

The little boy was the center of everyone's attention,

and so he happily did a little dance –

until a jealous seven-year-old named Jason charged  
over,

put both of his hands on Will's chest and shoved.

Will fell hard.

His rear end hit first, then his head, with a crack.

He looked utterly surprised at first.

No one had ever hurt him before, and he did not know what to make of it.

Then he opened up his mouth and he howled,

but not for long.

His mother hugged him and she helped him to his feet,

and the first thing Will did was to totter over to Jason.

He knew Jason was at the bottom of this thing,

but since such meanness was new to him he did not know what to do.

So he did what he had always done.

He put his arms around Jason and laid his head

against that mean little boy's body.

*“What Will did to Jason put an end to the meanness in that room...”*

*“This is what love is...*

*not a warm feeling between two like-minded friends*

*but plain old imitation of Christ,*

*who took all the meanness of the world*

*and ran it though the filter of his own body,*

*repaying evil for good, blame with pardon, death with life.*

*Call it a divine reverse psychology.*

*[Love] worked once, and it can work again,*

*whenever God can find someone else willing to give it a try.”*

Imitate Christ.

Act like Jesus.

It's not so hard to do.

When you practice hospitality,

when you meet folks wherever they are on their journey of life,

you will recognize who it is who walks with you on the  
Way.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

### Extra Material

The disciples have a word of encouragement for those of us who lose sight

of who walks beside us,

who don't recognize the Living Christ in our midst.

My wife and I have a good friend

who has not been back to church since 9-11, almost ten years ago.

She has lost her hope.

She no longer recognizes the presence of Christ by her side.

In Bloomington, Indiana there is a Disciples pastor

who serves First Christian Church named Mark Calvert-Rosenberger.

Mark is the brother of our own Tom Rosenberger.

Before I became Brewer-Calvert I was a Calvert, but Mark is not also my brother...only in the faith.

And it is a great faith.

Mark Calvert-Rosenberger said that he spoke with a man recently who had good questions about our shared humanity.

He asked how Mark's faith in Jesus Christ might explain the terrible acts

committed against those who were innocent.

He rattled off a litany that sounded like the morning newspaper headlines:

car bombings in the Middle East,

the killing of church members by a fellow member,  
the murder of a former prime ministering  
Lebanon,  
and so forth.

Mark thought for a few minutes and then said,

*“This world is not a perfect place.*

*My faith tells me that the world and everything in it,  
including human beings, is affected by sin.*

*We all have the capacity*

*to do awful things, think awful thoughts, and say awful  
words.*

*That is why we need God in Jesus Christ.”*

We need to God to remind us and inspire us and teach us how to say  
and do good things,

to be the positive change we hope to see and be in the world  
today.

That is why God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ,

comes to us and walks with us

and makes himself known in the breaking of the bread.

In Christ we have this hope that death and sin do not have the final  
say;

the light and love of God conquers all and overcomes the



darkness.

Mark's friend is still not convinced that Christianity is for him.

Mark thinks he still wants some part of this world

to be simple and completely good.

There is a piece of Mark, and a piece of all of us,

that wants the same.

But that is not the hand we have been dealt.

The Garden of Eden has good fruit and shade

as well as weeds and snakes and temptation,

and there is much tilling and work to do.

God continues to abide in the journey of life.

God lives in the messiness of our sin

and God brings redeeming love at great cost.

Mark's neighbor and our friend have ceased to look for signs of hope  
on the way,

and neither sees the promise of God in their daily life.

We who have this hope,

this spark of recognition,

this vision of God's redeeming love,

are commissioned by Christ himself to share it with our  
neighbors.