

4-19-26 Sermon Luke 24:13-35 Road to Emmaus

Grace and peace to you from God Almighty, Creator, Christ, and Holy Comforter.

Amen.

Over the years, I've lived in many different places. I grew up in a hundred-year-old two-story house in Galesburg, Illinois. The house belonged to my parents, of course, but it also belonged to me. It was still MY home. After college, I moved to a basement apartment in Sacred Heart, Minnesota, about two hours west of the Twin Cities. It was fine, but it wasn't actually an apartment at all, it was simply a basement that had a bed, a shower, a small kitchenette... But it was mine, it was still home. When I moved to seminary in St. Paul to start my pastor training, I moved into an actual apartment, and it was still mine, and it was still home. After graduating from seminary I moved to Marion, North Dakota into an actual house, with a yard and a garage and everything! It was still kind of small for a pastor and his growing family, but it was mine, and it was home. After leaving that first call, I moved on to other various churches and other various homes... Bettendorf, Iowa... then other places in Minnesota, like Gaylord... Wabasso... Redwood Falls... St. James... Willmar... Watertown... and now in St. Paul. In all these towns I lived in, each place was different, yet each place was the same. It was mine, and it was home.

I share all that history, because I'm guessing that you all have a place to call home as well — a house, a townhome, an apartment, someplace where you have a roof over your head and a bed to sleep in. Maybe you've lived in many different places over the years, and maybe you've lived in just one place over the years. Regardless of the details, wherever you've been, wherever you are now, that place is your home. Just like the place named in our gospel story today, where Jesus ends up sitting in a home, resting... sitting at a table, eating... sitting with friends, talking.

That's how the story ends, Jesus in a home. But the first part of the story doesn't take place sitting in a home. The first part of the story takes place on the road... On the

road to Emmaus. The word, "Emmaus," literally means "warm place," and that is exactly what happens on the road to Emmaus when Jesus encounters to people walking. The city of Emmaus is about seven miles from Jerusalem, where all the events of Holy Week have just taken place. You know those events, right? On Palm Sunday Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey... the religious leaders are nervous about his growing popularity... but the crowds love him. The religious leaders keep going after him, and then, even the crowds eventually turn on him, all because of the power he brings. But it's not the typical power of violence he brings... Jesus brings the power of peace. And so, on Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus shares his last supper with his disciples... and on Friday he's killed on a cross.

But then, on Easter morning, the tomb is empty. What in the world is going on here? That's the question that the two travelers ask on that first Easter evening as they walk with Jesus on that road to Emmaus. They're scratching their heads, confused, sad... Jesus meets them and asks them what's going on... only they don't know it's Jesus... to them he's just a stranger. These two travelers, Cleopas and his unnamed friend are grieving about all the things that have just happened, and the stranger (Jesus) says, "Wait... What? What are you talking about?" As if he doesn't know...

So Cleopas and his unnamed friend recount all the things that have just happened, all the things that I just named about Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Easter morning. To which the "stranger" finally says, "Don't you understand that all these things had to happen in order for the Messiah to fulfill God's plan?" And in this conversation, Cleopas and his unnamed friend begin to get a glimpse of the bigger picture.

But then it's time to part ways. "No, don't go," they tell the stranger. "Please stay with us!" So the stranger stays with them for a little while longer. And then, when they sit down to eat the bread... when they sit down to drink the wine... when they sit down together for this holy meal, the eyes of Cleopas and his unnamed friend are opened,

and they finally recognize this stranger for who he really is: it's Jesus, their risen Lord. But then, as soon as they recognize him, he vanishes from their sight.

"Weren't our HEARTS BURNING as we were talking along the road?" You know, their hearts are WARMED on the road to EMMAUS, which means WARM PLACE. "Weren't our HEARTS BURNING when he talked to us? Weren't our MINDS OPENED when he opened the scriptures to us? Weren't our EYES OPENED when he shared that meal with us?" Of course. All of that. Their HEARTS were burning... their MINDS were opened... their EYES were opened by the Living Lord who was right there in front of them. But then, as soon as they recognized him, their Living Lord took off... beyond that table they were sitting at... beyond that home they were sitting in... beyond the door that closed them in from the outside. Jesus had come to find them, but not to stay with them where they were. Jesus had come to find them, Jesus had come to open their hearts and minds, and Jesus had come to leave them so they could follow his lead.

It's been almost exactly one year since Pope Francis died, April 21, 2025, at the age of 88 years old. Most people described him as a fairly progressive Pope, working hard to break down walls of fear and ignorance and embrace ALL people, especially people on the margins, people on the edge, people who are often seen as the last, the lost, and the least. And as he embraced those folks, he encouraged others to do the same.

I remember reading up on him when he died last year, and one of the things I read was about one of the early Bible studies he led as a young priest, long before he was Pope. He talked about the famous picture of Jesus standing at the door and knocking. The traditional view of that painting is that Jesus is standing at the door knocking, waiting for the person on the other side to let him in. You know, there's no doorknob on the outside of the door where Jesus is, the doorknob is on the INSIDE of the door. The person inside is supposed to let Jesus in, let Jesus come into their home and into their lives.

That's a fine interpretation, and it has its place. But the young priest who eventually became Pope Francis saw it in a different way. He said, "Yes, I know the traditional view is that WE are waiting for JESUS to come inside, into our world. But what if JESUS is standing at the door waiting for US to come out to HIM instead? To join HIM in HIS world? To walk with HIM into his world?"

Isn't that what happened to Cleopas and his unnamed friend? Once Jesus was inside their home and they saw who he was, he left. Jesus didn't come to STAY in their home. Jesus came to INVITE them out into HIS world.

I don't know how many homes you have lived in over the years — I've lived in a bunch! But the number of homes we've lived in doesn't really matter — each place is a place we call our own, it is OUR home, YOUR home, MY home. But if that's our entire world, if that's the only place that matters to us, then our world is very small. Because just like in our story today, I'm convinced that Jesus is inviting us OUT of our little homes to join him in HIS BIG world, to reach out to those in need of our presence, in need of our support, in need of whatever it is we have to offer — food, clothing, shelter, a helping hand, a smiling face... hope... peace... comfort... joy.

I love this story, and I love all the hidden imagery, too... Like how "Emmaus" literally means "warm place"? And how "Cleopas" means "Glory of the Father," as they see the glory of the Father in Jesus. And then there's the identity of that "unnamed traveler" in this story. You know, the one who was walking with Cleopas down the Emmaus road. The story never gives that person a name, it just keeps referring to the two of them as "Cleopas and the other one." But I did some deep research, and I discovered who the other unnamed traveler is in this story. Do you want to know who it is? It's YOU. The other traveler is you... with your heart burning... with your mind opened... with your heart opened. Jesus is with you, and now has gone out ahead, inviting you to continue walking with him in every encounter with every other person you meet. Amen.