

Sunday Sermon April 19, 2026

I love the Easter Season. I love it because we hear accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances in our Gospel stories. For 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus appeared in his "resurrected" form. Different than before, Jesus now appears seemingly out of nowhere and then disappears after giving some gift or gifts.

Last week, Jesus came to a group of frightened disciples huddled in the upper room. He said, "peace be with you" and breathed the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the frightened band. He cared so much about his friend Thomas that Jesus returned the next week to show Thomas his wounded hands and side, literally giving him the gift of his body.

In another resurrection appearance in John's Gospel, Jesus has breakfast on the beach with Simon Peter. Peter – the one who had betrayed him. Peter was given the gift of forgiveness, given another chance to show his love for Jesus by heeding Jesus' call to "feed (his) lambs," to reach out to share a love that never dies.

In today's Gospel, Jesus comes alongside 2 ordinary disciples- Cleopas, who is not mentioned anywhere else, and an unnamed disciple. These two were not part of the inner circle. They were sad and confused and walking away. "We had hoped..." they said. We had hoped Jesus would be the one to overthrow those awful Romans and make us powerful. We had hoped he was an earthly king. We had hoped...

And Jesus simply comes beside them. He listens and patiently explains that he was not that kind of Messiah. Giving them the gifts of compassion and hope.

Notice here- in these three resurrection appearances- notice that Jesus doesn't come in extraordinary ways. He does not appear with lightning strikes or a booming voice from the clouds or some spectacular display of "Look at

me, I'm risen!" He does not come back visiting retribution on those who condemned him and tortured him to death.

He comes as he always came: with compassion, healing, forgiveness and peace to frightened, confused followers, locked away in fear. He comes to one who had betrayed him. He comes aside the ordinary and the nameless, not to chastise them for their lack of insight, but to patiently listen, explain and reveal himself in simple, yet profound, ways.

One of the marvels of this story is what Barbara Brown Taylor tell us in "Blessed Brokenness." She says: "The blindness of the two disciples does not keep their Christ from coming to them. He does not limit his post-resurrection appearances to those with full confidence in him. He comes to the disappointed, the doubtful, the discouraged. He comes to those who do not know their Bible, who do not recognize him even when they are walking right beside him. He comes to those who have given up and headed back home."

So maybe the question for us today is: Do we believe that? Do we believe that God comes to us and walks along side of us in the midst of our fears, doubts, blindness, misunderstandings, and even betrayals? Do we believe that God cares about US – ordinary us – fully flawed yet deeply loved? The Road to Emmaus suggests that we can believe in a world where Love comes beside and walks along with us.

Walks with those discouraged, confused disciples as a stranger. Notice that. It is their hospitality for a stranger that leads to their insight, the revelation of who it was at their table.

When I was a boy, we were taught about "stranger danger," taught to fear people we did not know. Many messages in the world around us suggest that the stranger, the foreigner, people who are different than us are a threat to be feared and avoided, even locked up. Yet God comes as a stranger on the Road to Emmaus and sometimes even now...

The last thing that I want to lift up in this wonderful resurrection story is the importance of the meal. As well as Jesus explains the scriptures about the

coming Messiah, as much as his insight made their hearts burn, it's the experience of bread broken that opens their eyes.

Bread broken takes them back to being fed along with 5,000 others in that field. Bread broken takes them back to the upper room, where at the last supper Jesus gave himself to them in gifts of bread and wine.

It's the experience of communion that opens their eyes to the presence of God in their midst in fields, at dining room tables, and at every moment. The experience reminds them that God can come in very real ways wherever and however we are on any given day.

As Pastor Anna Tew says: "It's interesting how many of these resurrection appearances revolve around food – and people gathered around food. Jesus makes the disciples breakfast on the seashore. Jesus breaks bread on the Road to Emmaus. As professor Don Saliers used to say: "Jesus loved meals so much, he became one."

Eating – and even more than mere eating, nourishment – is a profoundly human thing. And that is the whole point. Together, around tables and at the altar, we share laughter and uncertainty and frustration and sadness and joy. This is what it is to be human. We disappoint each other and we make each other's day, sometimes in the same week. We make each other cry and we make each other dance, with regularity. This is what it means to share life, to share love, to be human.

In the Gospels, the proof of the resurrection is Christ's risen body. In our world, the proof is Christ's Body the church. It is Christ's body, as we gather together, around the table, in all of our humanity, to be fed, to be transformed, to be sent."

People sometimes ask me what I believe about what happens to the bread and wine at the Eucharist. They wonder about transubstantiation or consubstantiation, or something else. I'm certainly happy to talk to them about these things, but I always tell them that what happens to the bread is not as important as what happens to us. Communion.

Two ordinary, dejected, confused disciples on the way to Emmaus met a stranger and were set on fire by what they experienced at the table. They knew Jesus was alive, and they just had to run out and tell it.

May we experience the same transformation at this table, and go forth to share the Good News of His life and love with everyone we meet.

Amen