

The Rev. Sarah Carver

Easter 3 2026

Our gospel today opens on a scene of some real despair. These two followers of Jesus—not from among the twelve but Cleopas and an unnamed person, are walking to this village outside of Jerusalem; Emmaus, a place that scholars aren't sure where or even if it actually existed, with some even seeing Emmaus as that place you go when all is lost and there is nowhere else to go. You might know what this feels like: when the bottom falls out and the loss is so great and it is easy to lose your orientation. But you walk anyway, to be anywhere but where you are, just to try and get away from the pain. That seems to be very true here. You can almost feel the slow, painful steps these two are taking as they are trying to make sense of the last three days. Not only has the one on whom they have put all their hope been destroyed, but now his body is missing and there is a cruel rumor out there that Jesus is supposedly alive. It would be fair if these two people on the road felt like the whole universe were messing with them.

And then they meet Jesus on the road but cannot recognize him as, we are told, their eyes were kept from doing so. I wonder what makes it impossible to see Jesus. Their grief? The impossibility that it could actually be Jesus? And as they begin to walk along, he asks them what they are talking about, and their hearts seem to break even more as they tell him about the one they lost. But instead of sympathy Jesus seemingly scolds them and breaks open the scriptures for them and explains and interprets Moses and all the prophets to and for them so that they might understand what is really happening. Surprisingly, it is again not here where they see Jesus. I am always surprised that in teaching them on the road,

their teacher is still unrecognizable to them. One would think that it is here, in helping them to understand what all has happened to the Messiah and how the scriptures have pointed to the Christ that this, this moment, is where they would have seen him. Yet it is not. It is not until the meal that evening, after having invited Jesus to stay with them in a gesture of care and hospitality, that they finally see the risen Christ when he takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. It is at the table, in the breaking of the bread, where they finally have their eyes opened and see that it is indeed Jesus.

In church we love to study. And indeed instruction has been a part of the Church throughout its history. It is important to teach the scriptures, to learn what they say, explore what they mean, for they give us our language of faith; it is essential to understand the traditions of the church for they ground us in our faith. It would have been an incredible gift to walk along with Jesus, even unknown, and have him open up the scriptures, to have our understanding increased and minds dazzled by knowledge. But from Luke's perspective, it is not in understanding where we encounter the risen Christ, it is not in knowing or possessing the correct understanding of text and prophecy that brings us to the Lord, rather it is in the broken bread, it is at the table with a friend. It is in communion where we encounter Jesus; it is in the Eucharist where we give our thanks for Christ and receive him back to ourselves. In our tradition, we celebrate the Eucharist, which literally means "to give thanks" each week. And in our tradition, we believe that at the altar, in the bread and wine, it is here that we are encountering the very real, very risen Jesus.

Henri Nowen writes: God desires communion: a unity that is vital and alive, an intimacy that comes from both sides, a bond that is truly mutual...a

communion freely offered and received. God goes all the way to make this communion possible. God becomes a child dependent on human care, a boy in need of guidance, a teacher searching for students, a prophet crying for followers, and finally, a dead man pierced by a soldier's lance and laid in a tomb. At the very end of the story he stands there looking at us, asking "Do you love me?" and again, "Do you love me?" and a third time, "Do you love me?" It is this intense desire of God to enter into the most intimate relationship with us that forms the core of the Eucharistic celebration and the Eucharistic life...God not only wants to enter human history...but God wants to become our daily food and drink at any time and any place. Therefore, Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to us. And then, as we see the bread in our hands and bring it to our mouths to eat it, yes, then our eyes are opened and we recognize him."<sup>1</sup>

Communion is relationship and as Nouwen reminds us it is not simply an action but a way of life. We are not simply commemorating an historical moment in our prayers and in receiving the bread and the wine, but it is our coming into that thin place where the heavenly banquet and the everyday meal of our common lives comes together so that all is imbued with resurrection. A Eucharistic life means that each of us takes the thanks we give here away with us when we step out of this space into the rest of our lives, into our world, into our relationships. This communion we participate in today and each week is not for here only, but for the rest of the world, not only for this moment but for each of our moments. Jesus was not just present to those we read about today in a land and time far, far away, but is present to us here as well, in relationship with us, united to us in life and love.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen. *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life*. Pg 87-88

We spent time with the Bishop two Saturdays ago, and he talked with us about our individual and corporate sense of vocation—asking what were we called to do here at St. Peter's, where we saw Jesus at work, and how we thought we might walk with one another. At the heart of the bishop's time with us was the reminder that we are all ministers within this congregation, that the members here are the flesh and blood of this community, that we are in communion with one another here. And that is true. When you join a church, you are committing to breaking bread with one another, to sharing a common life together, to supporting one another, caring for one another and together caring for the greater community and doing so as brothers and sisters, children of God living into the reality of the Kingdom. You make the community what it is by living into it. Your faith is expressed in how you do that. And it is always an act of faith to do this: to offer yourself to others trusting that they will offer themselves back to you. Because there is always the chance you will mess up, that you will be let down. But where would we be if no such trust existed, no such willingness to be vulnerable? This is why marriage is such an important model for us: it is the ultimate giving and receiving of oneself to another, a covenantal relationship grounded in communion, in unity, and as such it is the ultimate expression of Christ's self-giving love for us all. And so for St. Peter's at this time, we should remember how much we need one another, how much we are needed, how much we need to be sustained by the gift of communion, both here at the altar and everywhere else it is to be found. Because where that is, there is the Christ. For in that space is the real world, the world of the kingdom that should transform every other space in our lives.

What we do here today is meant to shape the rest of our week so that each meal we sit down to is touched by the holy. That each person we encounter is a fellow traveler looking for hope, and joy, and each moment is poised to offer revelation should our eyes be opened to see. What we do here is not just for us, but is meant to be shared. It is our work to, like these two people after seeing Jesus, go and tell the others about him. As Nowen also writes: "...that is the final call of the Eucharistic life. Go and tell. What you have heard and seen is not just for yourself. It is for all the brothers and sisters and for all who are ready to receive it. Go, don't linger, don't wait...but...return to the places from which you came, and let those whom you left behind in their hiding places know that there is nothing to be afraid of, that he is risen."<sup>2</sup>

Come and take this day, and then go and tell that the Lord is risen, and you have seen him. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Pg. 104