

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Second Sunday of Easter
Sunday, April 12, 2026**

**“Going to a Village Called Emmaus”
Luke 24:13-35**

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“Now on that same day, the first day of the week, two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem” (v. 13). This morning, we hear the story of a journey that happened on the evening of the first Easter Sunday.

That’s when; as two why—well, that’s a bit more complicated. Why are two disciples walking away on the day of Christ’s resurrection? It’s not that they’re unaware; “some women of our group astounded us,” these two recount. “They were at the tomb early this morning, 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” (v. 22-24). They know about Christ resurrection, but—for some reason—they’re unable to really take in and receive the message of Easter.

In any case, they really should have stayed in Jerusalem: they just heard that Christ is risen—but, rather than go see for themselves, they just...leave. I mean, with these two, it’s not, “Christ is risen! / He is Risen indeed!,” it’s “Christ is risen! / Okay, see ya!” Regardless of why, they’re clearly going the wrong direction...but maybe this shouldn’t come as a surprise: in the Gospels, the disciples are always depicted as flawed people; after Easter, they are, of course, still flawed people. And so here we see two disciples essentially running from God, fleeing from the presence of the Risen Christ.

And yet, despite their flaws (and their rather questionable decision-making that day), what happens? Jesus comes alongside them: “While they were talking and discussing,” Luke writes, “Jesus himself came near and went with them” (v. 15). In the stories of Easter, we see how the Risen Christ is willing to come alongside disciples who are doubting and faltering: Christ appears to disciples who are hiding or disbelieving (John 19:19-23; 19:24-29), and here—in the story of Emmaus—the Risen Christ basically chases down disciples who are running away from Easter.

Nonetheless, when Lord “himself came near,” the disciples immediately recognized him and rejoiced—the end. Right? No. No, the Risen Lord comes alongside—“but,” Luke says, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v. 16). Why? There are different interpretations, different ways of understanding their unwillingness or inability to recognize the Risen Christ...

Yet regardless, Christ does not give up on them or abandon them to their unbelief. They don’t get a pass; Jesus does call them ‘foolish’: “Oh, how foolish you are,” he says, “and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” (v. 25). Yet that’s not the end of the story; instead, the Risen Christ opens the Scriptures to them so that they can really hear the message of Easter hope. “‘Was it not necessary,’ Christ asks (still unrecognized), ‘that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (vv. 26-26).

But as it turns out, hearing the Scriptures anew was not enough to enable them to recognize the Risen Christ right in front of them; something more is needed...something that happens when they reach their destination and invite Jesus to stay with them. And it's there, in the village of Emmaus, that they at last recognize the Risen Lord. Luke writes: "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. 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" (vv. 29-31).

The reading and interpretation of Scripture turned out to be not quite enough; in addition, in order to recognize the Risen Christ, they also needed to sit at table with him and share a loaf of bread. Both, it turns, are necessary: the opening of Scripture on the journey and the breaking of bread at the table. As they would later report back to the other disciples: "The Lord has risen indeed," they say, telling "what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (vv. 34-35).

There's something about this story that should seem oddly, strangely, familiar. In the various stories of Easter, the stories of the Risen Christ, we find these little glimpses of the life of the church. In one story, in John, the disciples gather in an upper room on Easter Sunday, meet the Risen Christ, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and hear Christ's words of peace and forgiveness (20:19-23); in another, in Matthew, the disciples gather around the Risen Christ—some worshipping him, others doubting—before he sends them out in mission (28:16-20).

Now doesn't that all sound remarkably church? These early Easter appearances give us glimpses of what it means to be church—and they remind us that the church is, in its essence, the community of those who gather around the Risen Christ.

Just so, we find a vision of church on the road to Emmaus. Two flawed disciples—struggling with fear, grief, uncertainty—end up fleeing from the presence of the Risen Christ. Huh. Flawed Christian disciples, struggling to live out the Easter faith, acting in ways that distance them from God? Hmm...sound familiar? I wonder if there are enough flawed disciples that maybe we could form, like, a club; and we could meet together on—oh, I don't know—Sunday mornings maybe.

Those two disciples on the road to Emmaus? They're a lot like all of us! And have you ever noticed what their names are? One is named Cleopas, but the other is...left unnamed! It's often been assumed that they're both men, but—grammatically—the unnamed disciple could be a man or a woman. See, they are like us: there's a space in this story for us, for you: it's the story of Cleopas and [name], Cleopas and [name], on the road to Emmaus.

Then Christ graciously and lovingly comes alongside these flawed disciples, enabling them to find hope in Scripture and to recognize the Risen Christ in the breaking of bread. Hmm... Is that also a somehow familiar? Gee, I wonder if in our flawed-disciples-Sunday-club, we could read the Scriptures—and maybe we could designate somebody to interpret them each week. And I wonder if we could also have some sort of organized bread-breaking—though we'd probably need big table for that.

This is a glimpse of church: the Scriptures and the breaking of bread. Just as those flawed disciples found hope and recognized Christ in these ways, still today this is how and where we find our hope and likewise glimpse the Risen Lord—through Word and Sacrament.

At the beginning of the story, Luke writes: “the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem” (v. 13). The thing is, we don’t know where Emmaus was. At some point in the early church, the location of that village was forgotten, lost from the tradition; and although there have been guesses as to its location, no one can quite figure it out—mostly because “about seven miles from Jerusalem” is not exactly longitude and latitude.

But you know, I actually think it’s a good thing that—somewhere along the line—the location of Emmaus was forgotten. Because if we knew exactly where it was, then Christians would long ago have built a big ol’ church at the site, and there would be pilgrimages and people would point to it and say ‘That is the church of Emmaus.’ However, since the location is unknown, and no single church can claim to be the one ‘church of Emmaus’—this means that any church, sharing in the experiences of those disciples on the road, can be—in a real sense—a ‘church of Emmaus.’

And you know, this all makes me think a little differently about our two stained-glass windows of the Emmaus story. Should we see these merely as artistic depictions of something that happened long ago; or I wonder, could we see these windows more as a mirror, a reflection of what we are really about, a reminder of who we really are, a ‘church of Emmaus.’

On the road to Emmaus, Christ came alongside flawed disciples, and Christ comes alongside us today; he enabled disciples to find the hope of Easter in the Scriptures, and Christ’s Spirit opens the hope of the Scriptures to us today; at table, Christ enabled disciples to recognizing him in the breaking of bread, and still we meet Christ in the cup poured out and the bread broken. Thanks be to God. Amen.