

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Title: "Emmaus Road"

Date: 19 April 2026 (3rd Sunday of Easter, series A)

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognising him.

¹⁷ He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

¹⁹ 'What things?' he asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

²⁵ He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.'

³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

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Do you recognize this painting? It's by a Swiss artist named Robert Zünd, who painted it in 1877. What it illustrates, of course, is today's Gospel reading—that astonishing encounter that two of Jesus's disciples had with him as they were walking along the road from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus (on the afternoon of that first Easter Sunday). Notice how the artist uses all the elements of this picture to draw our attention to those three people, right there in the lower centre. That shows that this is not only a purposeful piece of art from a *technical* perspective, but an intentionally *Christian* painting, that wants to draw us all *into* this biblical story.



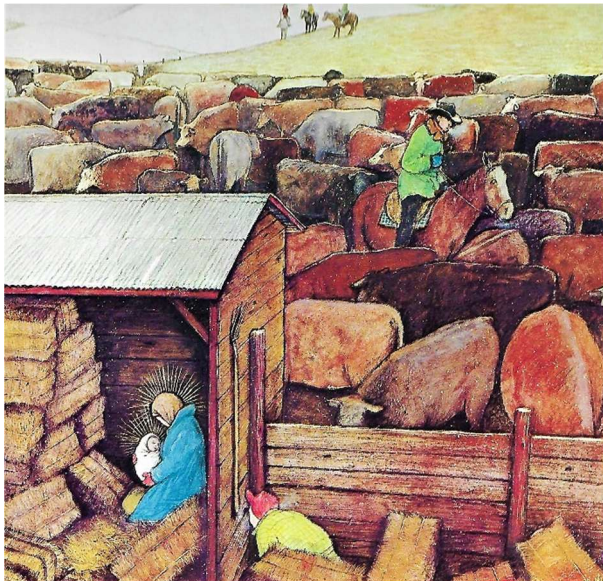
When I was a kid, growing up in Burnaby, it was the *scenery* that drew me into this picture, first of all. We had a big framed print of this painting on the wall in our living room, which gave me lots of chances to look at it (when I was watching TV, playing on the floor, or reading on the couch). I

remember being fascinated by the fact that this picture looked like the world *I* lived in, every time I went outside!—big trees... lush undergrowth... a trickling stream... a typical BC mix of sun and cloud. Now, of course, I'm more aware than I was back then of the *differences* between this area, and the part of Switzerland that inspired this painting! But the connections were close enough, when I was kid, to suck me right into the middle of this scene. "There's Jesus," I thought, "living in a place like this!"

And you know, I think that's partly what has sparked my interest over the years in the ways Christians in different cultures "import" Jesus into *their own* context—no matter how different their world is, from first-century Palestine. This painting we're looking at looks *way* more like Switzerland (or BC) than the actual area around Jerusalem. (→) It's possible, of course, that Robert Zünd ignored those differences because he didn't know any better! But I think he painted his picture the way he did *on purpose*—so that people with a European background (like most of us) would be *drawn into* that scene, and quickly and easily imagine ourselves being part of it.



You've probably seen other examples of this same sort of artistic approach to other biblical stories too. Here are two others, to get our imagination going:



- This painting is by the Canadian artist William Kurelek. He published a lovely book back in the '70s called *A Northern Nativity*, which showed Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in a whole bunch of stereotypical Canadian settings. This painting is called "The Cowboys' Christmas."

Here is a totally different scene in every way. Can you figure out what it is? It's by a Korean artist named Kim Ki-Chang, who imagined the life of Jesus as if he were a medieval Korean nobleman. As you can maybe tell, this picture is called "Entry into Jerusalem," and it illustrates Palm Sunday.



Getting back to *today's* painting, the familiarity of its setting was *only part* of what drew me into it, as a kid. I was *just* as fascinated by what was taking place *within* that setting. Boy, did *I* ever wish Jesus would talk to *me* like that! There were so many things I wanted to know (even as a kid!) that only *Jesus* could tell me. There I was, growing up in a stable Christian home, with family all around—and a pastor for my Grandpa! But even so, I *still* had many questions, doubts, and challenges about *so many* things that only the Lord can help me with. As I've grown up, I've come to see that this

is one of life's great "constants," no matter who we are (and whatever age or stage of life we're at). Absolutely, the *content* of our questions varies from person to person—and it changes over time. But the *way* in which these questions trouble us, is pretty similar all the way along the line. Every time I have ever gone through a crisis of faith—whether the presenting problem was big or small, and whether I found myself facing it as a kid, teenager, young adult, grown-up, or (what am I now? An "older adult"?)—I've always had this same sort of longing to *find* a peaceful path in a nearby forest, and *run up to* this little group of three men, and say, "Jesus, pardon me—I'm in such a pickle right now! Can I just ask you a couple of questions? Even just five minutes of your time would make such a difference!"

For it's obvious, isn't it, in this reading, how much of a difference Jesus's time and care made to that pair of disciples who were there on that road, way back then. At first, they too had *way* more questions than answers. The shattering of their Saviour's body on the cross had shattered their faith! What good was a dead Messiah, anyhow? "**We had hoped,**" they lamented to this stranger, "**We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.**" (21a). All the signs had *seemed* to be pointing in that direction! After all (as they put it), "**he was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people!**" (19) So—how on earth had it all come to this, anyway?—with "**the chief priests and [Jewish] rulers handing him over to be sentenced to death, and the Romans crucifying him.**" (20) As if that wasn't bad enough, "**it was now the third day since all this had taken place**"—meaning that if something was going to change, it certainly would have changed by now. (21b) So much for their hope! *Apparently*, Jesus was dead and gone—and *that was that*. All these guys could do was adjust, and cope, and try to move on. "**We had hoped,**" they said—"**we had been hoping that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.**" (21a) But now that hope was just as dead as he was.

There's so much pathos there, isn't there? *Pathos* is a mixture of sadness, disappointment, and regret. And I think you and I can relate to that, when we think about some of the hopes *we've* had in life as well.

- I remember hoping (when I was a teenager) that I'd be "all settled down and content" by the time I became an adult.
- Then (when I *was* a young adult), I hoped that my wife and I (if I was ever *blessed* enough to *find* a wife) would always be a perfect couple.
- Then (before Brenda and I had kids), I hoped it would be "smooth sailing" (if the Lord *blessed* us with kids), so we could just be one big happy family forever.

I'm guessing that many of you can relate to this. I'm guessing that you too *grieve* over a *lifelong* series of unrealized (maybe even *unrealistic*) hopes. We set ourselves up (don't we) by polishing all kinds of shiny hopes and dreams that the *roughness* of life *inevitably* ends up tearing to pieces.

- *Some* of us deal with those disappointments (over time) by learning to lower our expectations. "We're not even going to aim for '10s' anymore," we tell ourselves; "5s and 6s are the most we can realistically hope for!"
- But *others* of us (from stubbornness, or idealism, or both)—others of us just keep on putting ourselves through this same old cycle, time and time again—in *this* dimension of life, and *that* one. "**We had hoped this... we had dreamed that... and now look at the mess we're dealing with, instead!**"

It's a good thing I'm not Jesus—because *I* would have probably given up both on myself and on those Emmaus disciples long ago. But thankfully, the *real* Jesus *didn't* do that, in the scene Luke paints for us here today.

- Instead, the real Jesus “**walks with them, and talks with them**”—just like that sentimental old song says! (That song, “In the Garden,” is a little *too* sentimental to be one of my personal favourites, but it certainly is based on Scripture, and I know that a lot of people like it.)
- And in all sorts of different ways, Jesus also goes on (as this reading unfolds) to “**tell them they are his own.**”

How much time did he invest in doing that?

- Considering that Emmaus was “**about 7 miles from Jerusalem,**” it probably took them a couple of hours to cover that distance (depending how fast they were walking, *and* how far “into the journey” they already were, by the time Jesus came up from behind to join them). (13)
- The fact that Jesus *used* that “walking-and-talking time” to “**explain to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself**” *also* suggests that he spent *a lot of time* taking their fears and worries seriously. (27) Wouldn’t that have been something, to hear which particular Old Testament passages he talked about, and what he had to say about them?
- And then, as if that wasn’t already enough: When they finally got to Emmaus... and realized that Jesus was “**continuing on, as if he were going further**”... and when they pleaded with him, “**Abide with me, fast falls the even-tide**” (a hymn we’re going to sing at the end of this service, based on this reading)—well, then too Jesus “put himself fully at their disposal,” first by “**going in to stay with them,**” then by sharing the evening meal with them. (29-30)

What a powerful effect our Saviour’s love and care *had* on these downcast, disappointed disciples. By sticking with them, and by giving them *all that time* to “work through” their frustrated hopes and dashed dreams, Jesus brought both of them back, bit by bit, onto an even keel. Sure, it took him a while to do that! But at a certain point, “**their eyes were [finally] opened, and they recognized him.**” (31)

Literally, all that means is what it says. They *perceived* with their *eyes* that this guy they had been talking to, all this time, *really was* Jesus. He *had been* raised from the dead and he *was* alive again—just the way “**some of the women**” in their group had told them! (22)

Why they hadn’t recognized him *earlier*, is a very good question! It’s a mystery, in fact, that we keep on bumping up against, in many of Christ’s post-resurrection appearances.

- Mary, for instance, thought Jesus was “**the gardener,**” when she saw him for the first time on Easter morning. (John 20:15)
- A couple of weeks later, when all of his disciples spotted him on a beach, up north on the Sea of Galilee, they too “**did not know it was him.**” (John 21:4)
- Right after today’s Gospel reading, Luke tells us about another occasion too when the disciples didn’t recognize Jesus until he finally “**ate some broiled fish**” right there in front of them, to show that it really *was* him! (Luke 24:36-43)

We don’t know *how* Jesus’ appearance was different enough (on all of those occasions) from what his disciples had gotten used to, to throw everybody off. But clearly it *did* throw them off—right up to the moment he chose to “reveal himself.”

On another level, too, though, the fact that those disciples’ “**eyes were opened, so that they could recognize Jesus**” also seems to mean *more* than what those words themselves literally mean. What they *also* came to recognize, *spiritually* speaking, was that Jesus really was the Lord.

- *He* knew the score, a whole lot better than they did.
- *He* had a plan for everything that was happening, whether or not they understood it.
- *He* not only had answers to their questions about the past, but he also foresaw things taking place in the future that they had absolutely no way of anticipating (or even imagining).

All *they* had been able to see, so far, was their own shattered hopes and disappointments—but now, everything looked different. The time that Jesus had spent with them, and the patience he had shown them, gave them a *totally new* and *far more positive* “vision” of what was really going on. It was *such* an exciting vision, in fact, that they “**got up and returned at once to Jerusalem,**” as soon as Jesus left them!—even though it was already late in the evening. (33, 29) And as soon as they got there, their excitement pretty much burst out of them, as they “**told [the Eleven and those who were with them] what had happened along the way, and how they had finally recognized Jesus when they broke the bread.**” (33, 35) Their Saviour’s patient care in their time of need, had dramatically *changed* their whole perspective.

What a positive, hopeful outcome that was—both for those original disciples and for us. For the Lord who “**redeemed**” us once (“**from the empty way of life that was handed-down to us from our ancestors**”), *continues* to “**redeem**” us now, from all of our present-day doubts and troubles. The salvation that our Saviour accomplished for us *then* on the cross, becomes real to us *now* (again and again!)—as He “**comes up**” to us, too, in our need... and “**walks along with us**” ... and answers our questions (as we read, and study, and talk about His Word)... and graces our table with his presence (as we celebrate the gift of His Supper). (15)

On *that* side of the cross and empty tomb, Jesus once invited his disciples: “**Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.**” (Matt 11:28) On *this* side of the cross and empty tomb, he turns that promise into action, for all of us anxious and troubled travelers along life’s way.

So, let us *not* be slow to *share* with our risen Lord any of *our* disappointments. For sure, we too are dealing with so many unexpected developments. We too *struggle* to hang onto hope... and to *make sense* of what’s going on right now in the world around us... and to *come to terms* with whatever new challenges and surprises might lie ahead.

In all those times of our great need, we too can and should *tell* our Saviour Jesus about *all* the ways in which we too “**had been hoping**” for things to turn out differently than how they actually have. (21) For with us, too, our risen Lord Jesus will always be patient, and gentle, and gracious. We can *count on him, every day*, to keep on “**opening up our eyes**” to the wonderful gift of his presence—again, and again, and again. (31) Thanks be to God! Amen.