

Easter III – April 19, 2026

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

1Peter 1:17-33

Luke 24:13-35

The Slow Walk to Emmaus

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

A few years back, during a service of Healing and Holy Eucharist, twelve of us sat in a circle to hear the lessons and prepare for communion. Instead of a sermon, we, as a group, reflected on the meaning of the lessons in what was often a lively and sometimes poignant exchange, much like the Thursday morning services we have here at St. Barnabas. During Easter week, a longtime regular attendee of the midweek service, who is also a member of a Lutheran Church in Port Angeles, shared a delightful story about Holy Trinity's Easter service. When the kids came forward for the children's Easter message, the pastor explained to the congregation that resurrection is a challenging topic for adults and an even more challenging topic for children. Christ died, was gone, and was out of sight. Then what? How are any of us to wrap our minds around a mysterious event that happened on a Sunday morning a very long time ago? Babies have what is known as "object impermanence." If you cover a toy with a blanket, a baby will think that the object is gone forever. When the blanket is lifted, the baby squeals with delight to see that the toy has returned from seemingly out of nowhere. If the baby covers her eyes, she will believe that the dad she had been playing with had simply disappeared. When she uncovers her eyes, the child is elated that her father has returned. You know the name of the game. To help the children connect with the somewhat abstract idea of Jesus' resurrection, the pastor engaged the children in a game of "peek-a-boo!" Here, at St. Barnabas, when I say "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" you say, ["Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!"] The pastor at Holy Trinity said to the children and the congregation: "Now, kids, I want you to cover your eyes. When I say "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" uncover your eyes like this... and say "Peek-a-boo!" Let's try it. "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" "Peek-a-boo!" ...and so went the enthusiastic announcement of Jesus' resurrection throughout the Easter Sunday service at Holy Trinity in Port Angeles. Though there can be no definitive breakdown, analysis, and conclusions about the resurrection... though the mystery of THE most important event of our faith story remains... the Alleluia Peek-a-boo exchange engaged both children and adults, adding meaning and relevance to the celebration of Easter.

For today, we are considering Sunday's journey on a road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. It was slow highway between what was... and a whole new day. For Cleopas and his companion, the road was a pathway that bridged two worlds... the world of Friday's sorrow and a world in which an empty tomb was evidence that death could not be contained. As the two walked, they were trying to untangle a mess of mixed emotions that were weighing heavily on them. The fresh wound of grief still ached even as the two tried to wrap their minds around the day's headline as told by women who were the first witnesses of the resurrection. On the road, the two would meet a stranger whose living presence would shine a light upon, and make clear, the events of Sunday morning. Jesus is alive? How could this possibly be? How could Cleopas and his companion believe the unbelievable? As the two walked the seven-mile stretch of road between Jerusalem and Emmaus, they were trying to make sense of the news, examining the resurrection story from many angles...

turning the accounts of recent events over and over again.... tossing the story back and forth... trying to find meaning when no simple answers would suffice.

The gospels report eight different accounts of resurrection appearances. In some of the accounts, Jesus is recognized right away. In others, Jesus is mistaken for a gardener or, as in the case of the locked room, a hesitant Thomas insists that he must touch Jesus' wounds in order to believe that Jesus' presence is real. In today's resurrection account from Luke's gospel, as Cleopas and his companion are walking along, Jesus joins them, but they do not recognize him. It is as if they have blindfolds on. Jesus is like a stranger to them. It wasn't until... after a long afternoon of walking and talking with the resurrected one... that the blindfolds fell and the two had an "Aha!" moment, recognizing Jesus before he disappeared, again, from their sight. We are not told why some of Jesus' followers were unable to recognize him after His resurrection. We know that Jesus repeatedly told the disciples that he was destined to die and then to rise again after the third day. Maybe they did not fully understand what Jesus had told them. But then... how could they? The prediction was simply too unbelievable. Maybe the disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus because they were simply not looking for him. The eyes of their hearts were covered by grief and despair shielding any glimmer of hope that there would be a better day.

As we consider today's walk to Emmaus, we may find the experience uncomfortably familiar, sad, and even disorienting. When Jesus sidles up to Cleopas and his companion he asks: "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." The words "But we had hoped" speak of disappointment, grief, and desperate yearning. The words "But we had hoped" speak of the raw realities of our human experience...

But we had hoped
...that the tumor wasn't malignant.

But we had hoped
...that our marriage would get easier.

But we had hoped
...that the depression would lift.

But we had hoped
...that we would not get laid off from our jobs.

But we had hoped
...that we would be able to carry the baby to term.

But we had hoped
...to experience God's presence when we desperately needed God.

But we had hoped

...that our sputtering faith would come back to life.

The road between Jerusalem and Emmaus... is the slow highway between what was... and a life-changing awakening... The road is a pathway that joins two worlds.... the world of Friday's sorrow, and, in the case of the Emmaus story, the "Aha!" at a dinner table... the resurrection made real. Christ's living presence was revealed to two bereft souls who are awakened and reoriented into a new future.

On the road to Emmaus, the risen Christ finds... and walks with two who were travelling the road of confusion and despair. On the road, the living one will teach them, feed them, heal them, and give them back their own resurrected selves. Jesus will be with the two at a dinner table where he will offer a blessing before tearing apart a crusty loaf of freshly baked bread and giving it away... in a loving gift of divine presence... in a healing moment that calls back together... the broken pieces of two shattered lives. A great gift is given before Jesus vanishes from their sight.

We do not walk alone... on the road between what was and the promise that is to come. We make the journey... together... as companions on the Way, and in the knowledge that Christ walks with us whether... in any given moment... we recognize his presence or not.

Once upon a time, on a sad, sad day, on the road of broken dreams between now and not yet, the risen Christ was made known in a spoken Word, in the breaking of bread, and in a sip of wine...

God's living presence...

blessed

broken

and given to us,

for all...

now,

this day

and forever more...

I would like to end with words of the Benedictine monastic and author Macrina Wiederkehr. Let us pray:

[Gracious God] open [our] eyes to the moments of resurrection that surround [us] every day. There is always something rising, opening to new life, budding and blossoming, forgiving and transforming. Teach [us] to live awake that [we] may recognize the renaissance being celebrated in [our] midst at every moment. Make [us disciples] of joy.

Alleluia!!!

Amen.¹

¹ Macrina Wiederkehr in *The Flowing of Grace Now: Encountering Grace Through the Weeks of the Church Year* (Notre Dame, IN; Soren Books, 2019).