

On the road to Emmaus

Third Sunday of Easter, April 19 2026

Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19; Luke 24: 13-35

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Last week, I was in Migros – the holiest of places, where saints and sinners alike gather in the queue for the reduced-price bread. I was in a hurry, of course, because no one ever goes to the supermarket with the calm spirit of a monk. I just wanted milk. One item. Simple.

But the universe had other plans. As I reached the checkout, the person in front of me was having what can only be described as a biblical crisis with the self-scan machine. It beeped. It flashed. It refused to accept that bananas are, in fact, bananas. The poor soul sighed, muttered, and finally turned to me with that universal look of supermarket despair. And something in me – perhaps the Holy Spirit, perhaps the fact that I wasn't going anywhere fast – nudged me to smile and say, "Don't worry, these machines test the patience of saints." They laughed. I laughed. The machine, miraculously, accepted the bananas.

And in that tiny moment of shared humanity, I felt it – that warm Emmaus-road flicker of recognition. Christ wasn't waiting for me in a grand cathedral or a quiet prayer corner. He was right there between the discount yoghurts and the self-checkout, reminding me that grace often arrives disguised as patience, humour, and a stranger who just needs a bit of kindness. Sometimes Jesus shows up exactly where we least expect him – even in aisle seven

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Psalm 116 and the story of the road to Emmaus share a heartbeat of gratitude and recognition – the joy of discovering that God is near when life feels uncertain. In Psalm 116, the psalmist cries out in distress and then rejoices, saying, "You have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling." That same movement from sorrow to joy unfolds on the Emmaus road: two disciples, weighed down by grief, suddenly realise that the risen Christ has been walking beside them all along. Both passages remind us that God's presence often surprises us – turning lament into thanksgiving, despair into hope. When we look back on our own journeys, we too can say with the psalmist and the disciples, "The Lord has heard my voice," and our hearts burn with renewed faith.

The Road of disappointment

Two disciples walk away from Jerusalem, their hopes shattered. The one they thought would redeem Israel has been crucified. Their steps are heavy, their conversation full of confusion. They've heard rumours of resurrection, but they can't quite believe them. We know that road, don't we? The road of disappointment, when faith feels like a story that's lost its ending. When prayers seem unanswered, and the world feels dim. Yet it's precisely on that road – not in the temple, not in triumph – that Jesus draws near. Luke names only one of the travellers: Cleopas (v.18). The other remains unnamed and ungendered. Luke often pairs men and women in his Gospel – Simeon and Anna (Luke 2), the widow of Nain and Jairus (Luke 7–8), Martha and Mary (Luke 10) – so the absence of a female identifier here is notable. Some scholars argue that if Luke intended a male female pair, he would likely have signalled it clearly. Others, however, note that Luke's silence leaves room for possibility.

Whether the pair were two men or a man and a woman, Luke's emphasis lies not in their identity but in their recognition. The story celebrates how Christ meets us in ordinary companionship – in shared conversation, hospitality, and the breaking of bread. The gender of the travellers may remain a mystery, but the message is clear: Christ walks with all who journey in sorrow and hope.

The stranger who walks beside us

Jesus joins them, but they don't recognise him. He listens first – not correcting, not condemning, but walking with them in their grief. Then he opens the Scriptures, showing how the story of suffering and glory has always been intertwined. Sometimes Christ comes to us as a stranger: in a conversation, a moment of kindness, a quiet insight. We may not see him at first, but he is there – patient, listening, revealing truth in ways that make our hearts burn within us.

The table of recognition

When they reach Emmaus, they invite him to stay. At the table, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them – and suddenly their eyes are opened. The ordinary act of hospitality becomes holy revelation. Faith often rekindles not in grand gestures but in simple acts: sharing a meal, offering welcome, breaking bread together. Christ is recognised not in spectacle but in community.

The journey back

The disciples don't stay in Emmaus. They rush back to Jerusalem, hearts ablaze, to tell others what they've seen. Encounter leads to mission; revelation leads to witness. When we meet Christ – in Scripture, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread – we are called to go and share that joy. The road that began in sorrow ends in proclamation.

A word for us today

We walk many roads: some filled with hope, others shadowed by loss. But the Emmaus story reminds us that Christ walks with us even when we don't recognise him. He listens to our confusion, opens our hearts to truth, and reveals himself in the breaking of bread. Jesus still meets us in the most unexpected places – not only in church pews or moments of prayer, but in the ordinary rhythms of life. He comes to us on the "roads" we walk every day: in the quiet of a morning commute, in a conversation that lifts our spirits, in the kindness of a stranger, or even in the stillness after disappointment. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we often don't recognise him at first.

Yet when hearts are open and hospitality is offered – when we pause, listen, and share – we discover that Christ has been walking beside us all along, turning the ordinary into holy ground. Another way of looking at this is that, even in the storms of life, Jesus is in the boat with us. We've just got to remind ourselves of that. So, as we travel our own Emmaus roads, may we be attentive to the stranger who walks beside us. May our hearts burn with the warmth of his presence. And may we, like those first disciples, rise and go – carrying the good news that Christ is risen indeed.