

*Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11 and Luke 24:13-25*  
*Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway*  
*April 23, 2023*

## Takes, Blesses, Breaks, Gives

A locker room after the championship game is lost. The college admissions letter that never arrives. The emergency room after an unsuccessful tracheotomy. A quiet office after a layoff notice arrives in an inbox. A lonely bathroom where a that second line just won't appear on the pregnancy test.<sup>1</sup>

This is where Cleopas and his companion find themselves. They've lost. They're defeated. They poured their whole lives and selves into following this man they knew was the savior. They gave up everything to follow him. Then he died—defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory. The one who was supposed to deliver them all couldn't even deliver himself from the cross.

In our calendars it has been two weeks since Easter morning, but our text for this Sunday takes us right back to that day. According to Luke, the events of the story we read this morning took place Easter afternoon and evening. A couple of his followers, walking, thinking, talking, trying to make sense of their lives now.

Much of my sermon this morning comes from an article I read in *The Christian Century* not long ago, written by United Congregational Church pastor, Jeffrey Gallagher. His reflections on this story of the walk to Emmaus touched me in some ways I had not thought of before and I wanted to share it with you.

This isn't how the story was supposed to end in the minds of Jesus' first followers, is it? Remember the waving palm branches? What about the victory and celebrating and God's kingdom coming to earth? All of it, gone.

Now they find themselves walking down a road to Emmaus. Historians tell us Emmaus may or may not have been an actual place. But we know it still, don't we? Author, Frederick Buechner writes that Emmaus is the place where, "we throw up our hands and say 'Let the whole thing just go hang. It makes no difference anyway.'"<sup>2</sup> It's *that* place of desolation. It's the parent holding their stillborn child in their arms, walking around the delivery room, with no idea where to go or what to do. It is that place where we look into the eyes of our beloved and they no longer recognize us. It is that place where the diagnosis changes all the dreams we ever had. It is that place where the heart is broken and we can not see beyond it.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey M. Gallagher, *The Christian Century*, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/april-30-third-sunday-easter>

<sup>2</sup> *The Magnificent Defeat*, Seabury Press, 1966; pg. 85-86

And then the miraculous happens: Jesus comes near! But unfortunately, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

Why don't they see him, the one they put their faith in and left everything for? Are tears clouding their vision? Their minds so filled with loss that their senses are numb? Or maybe they are simply unable to lift their heads from watching the dust stir around their sandals on the ground before them?

Luke leaves those details to our imaginations. We only know that Jesus invites them to tell their story. “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along? What is on your mind, in your heart?”

And they share. They share what it was like to watch their friend persecuted and killed. They share what it was like to look across Golgotha and see the Roman guards celebrating their victory, what it was like to walk through Jerusalem and be laughed at by those who never thought Jesus was the Messiah. They share what it was like to flee the city, fearful that they might be crucified next—to start toward a destination unknown because they simply can't stay where they are. They share what it is like to feel defeated, deflated, and alone.

They do this on Easter Sunday, when the women went to the tomb and then told the others what they heard and saw: not just the missing body but the angels, saying that Jesus is alive. Yet, Cleopas and his companion can't see it, can't see past the empty tomb, which is no sign of victory to them.

So Jesus tries to explain it all: *Don't you understand that this is all part of something more? We talked about this. Don't you remember? He tries to explain it to them... again. But they did not remember. They don't understand. The pain and loss is too much to see or hear anything.*

By now it's gotten late. So they offer him a place to lay his head for the night—not because he's Jesus, just because it's the hospitable thing to do. They sit down to a meal together, and their guest takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them.

Takes, blesses, breaks, gives—how many times have they seen him do that before? Around the table, surely. But when else? When he took a young child to his knee, blessed her, broke through the disease that held her captive, and then gave her back to her parents newly healed?

When he went into the temple and approached the money changer's stand? Maybe he said a prayer before breaking it down and then handing it, in pieces, back to the money changer, saying that he would do this and more in the days to come?

They probably didn't understand what he was doing then, either. But they saw him take, bless, break, and give; they have seen this pattern before.

They must have, because in this moment their eyes are opened. It isn't when he comes near them; it isn't when he walks with them; it isn't when he tries to explain it all to them, again.

It is when he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives them bread—something so ordinary that they have seen it before, time and time again. It's only then that the tears give way, their heads look up from the table, and they finally see who has been journeying with them. Jesus is alive after all! The tomb, the angels, the women—can it really be true? Yes! It is all coming back to them now—they see. And then, in an instant, they see no more. He is gone.

Is this not the way God so often enters our lives? Not in some grand event, but in ordinary taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. In the hug of a friend we haven't seen in a while, in the laughter of a child frolicking in the grass, in breaking a trail through the woods on a hike, in a meeting to discuss possibilities, in giving to a food pantry, in blessing an evening meal: we recognize God.

With our eyes opened in the midst of this everyday reality, we are reminded that all is not lost. We are not defeated *or alone*. Love has won; Easter is here to stay. We see, and we begin to understand—and in that instant, Emmaus is gone.

As I mentioned earlier, this road to Emmaus story comes to us in our lectionary two weeks following Easter. It brings Easter morning right back for us, recounting events that, according to Luke, happened that very same afternoon and evening. It is a story of hope and encouragement for followers of Jesus. People then and now who are living our own Emmaus walks.

Love has won. Easter is here to stay. Even when we don't remember or don't understand or can not see for the tears in our eyes, Jesus comes near, as many times as are needed until we finally do see and understand.<sup>3</sup>

This story felt to me, as I reflected on it this week, almost like a templet, or a recipe for how we might live our Easter faith today. Life *is* a journey. Shattered dreams sometimes. Places of desolation and hopelessness. Yet, when we walk with each other, discuss the things that have transpired in our lives, raise the theological questions, talk some more, let scripture give us 'course corrections', sit at table together, where our eyes are opened again and again, it is in these ordinary things that we come to know who and what we are as children of the God, people of the resurrection, Easter people. And then in turn, like Cleopas and his companion, move out into the world to share our hope, our faith with others.

It is good to come back to Easter day. To remember again the joy and to consider how Jesus' coming along side and, taking, blessing, breaking and giving, can and does change lives, our own and others.

May our eyes be opened and our steps full of God's grace and power.

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffery M. Gallagher, *The Christian Century: Sunday's Coming, Who is Cleopas*, Email, April 23, 2017.