

Rotation.org Writing Team **EMMAUS**

BIBLE BACKGROUND

PASSAGE

Luke 24:13-35

The Emmaus (eh-MAY-us) Journey

The story begins on “the same day,” that very same Sunday of the resurrection. The journey leads away from Jerusalem, away from the crucifixion and the confusing reports of an empty tomb.

Emmaus was “a village about seven miles from Jerusalem,” but its exact site is uncertain. Possibly el-Qubeibah, about 7 miles northwest of Jerusalem, is the site of this village. The friends leaving town were disciples, but not among the twelve. Luke tells us only the name of Cleopas. The unnamed disciple reminds us that there were many disciples whom we have not known by name and who were devastated by Jesus’ execution.

Picture the two disciples in animated debate as they travel. The Greek word translated “discussing” suggests more intensity than a discussion. Realize the depth of their despair: these two have just seen all their fresh new hope for the arrival of God’s kingdom utterly dashed and their own lives put at risk.

Some scholars suggest that the original couple could have been a husband and wife. This suggestion is based on the reference to “Mary, wife of Clopas,” who appears with the other Marys at the foot of the cross in John 19:25. Clopas and Cleopas are very similar, and could have been recorded differently. Then Cleopas’ companion (wife) may have been the one who spread the table at the inn at which Jesus broke bread.

“Jesus himself came near and went with them.” This simple statement stresses the continuity between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ. The verb used for “to draw near” was the one most often used to describe God’s reign being “at hand.” The fact that Jesus walked with them when all the followers of Jesus had tried to stand at a distance from the events of the crucifixion (Luke 23:49) indicates forgiveness. We may abandon the Christ; Christ does not abandon us.

How can we explain their failure to recognize Jesus? Perhaps we must assume that he was simply the last possible person they expected to see. And we have to wonder at his own incredible restraint. Who among us would not have been tempted to jump out of the bushes and cry, “Hey fellas, look? It’s me. I’m alive.” But Jesus, consummate teacher, patiently waits for his students to make this ultimate discovery on their own.

The stranger asks what they were discussing, and Cleopas replies with apparent sarcasm, “Are **you** the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place in these days?” (Emphasis added.) Such irony!

Thomas Groome then notes that the stranger urges the disciples to speak from their own experiences and disappointments. This is Jesus the Teacher leading his students to explore and articulate their understanding of what has happened. Sometimes we do not know what we know until we put it into words.

They had known Jesus as a prophet mighty in word and deed. They recount how the leaders handed him over to be crucified, seemingly killing both the prophet and their hope that he was to redeem Israel. Their expectations included national political leadership as well as prophetic religious leadership. They speak of their confusion over reports of the women seeing an empty tomb and visions of angels. The students need to put their own understanding in their own words before they are ready to grapple with Jesus’ bold interpretation of scripture and subsequent revelation of himself.

The stranger claims that the crucifixion was not a failure, but a necessity if the Messiah were to enter into glory. Imagine the disciples transfixed by Jesus’ interpretation of all the things about himself throughout the Hebrew scriptures.

When the two arrive at their lodging (possibly a home or an inn), the stranger appears to plan to travel farther. They plead with him to accept their hospitality, to be their guest. (Remember the importance of hospitality in this culture.) The stranger then becomes the host. Boldly he “took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” -- and in that act they recognized the Christ.

Fellowship (“communion” with others)

The pair was sharing together supporting one another in their grief and it was in welcoming another into the fellowship that the great good news was revealed. The meal and the talking together point us to seeking the fellowship of God's people when we are mourning, in doubt and seeking after God and God's answers.

In the dramatic moment of Christ's self-revelation, we recall other times when Christ broke bread and shared it. The feeding of the hungry crowds (Luke 9:10- 17) was followed by Peter’s recognition that this was indeed the Christ. The breaking of bread in the upper room was interpreted as the sealing of the new covenant.

Word and Sacrament

In hearing the Scriptures the two felt "our hearts burning within us." In the breaking of the bread their eyes were open. Making the connection between the acts of the Lord's Supper and the word proclaimed in worship dramatically illustrates who we are as a worshipping people.

Just as soon as they recognized the risen Lord, he was gone. His work with them was complete. Perhaps his immediate disappearance is a clue that he will not be "with" them in the same way he was with them before his crucifixion.

Earlier the disciples had told him that the hour was too late to continue his journey past Emmaus, but now they make an even more dangerous journey of their own – reversing their steps to return the entire seven miles to Jerusalem in the dark. They are unable to contain their awe and excitement, so eager are they to tell “what happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Their experience is apparently not dampened by the fact that Jesus has also already appeared to Simon. They are ready to confirm with their own witness that the impossible has occurred. The Lord is risen indeed.

Evangelism

Traveling the Emmaus Road with Jesus cannot be just a personal journey. The disciples must share the Good News with others. Our knowledge, experience, and relationship with God are not just ends to themselves but impel us to share the Good News. The season of Eastertide is a great time of year to heighten the children's awareness that we have Good News to share with the world.

RESOURCES

Groome, Thomas H. *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. Jossey-Bass, February 1999.

Wehrheim, Carol A., Editor. "Along the Road with Jesus," *The StoryTeller Series*. Christian Board of Publication, 1994.

Useful statements from the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Basic Belief: We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God. God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal. *A Brief Statement of Faith*, lines 7-8, 23-26.

Beginner's Catechism "Belonging to God" Presbyterian Church (USA) Question 27. How did Jesus Christ prove to be our Savior? He sacrificed his life for us by dying on the cross. He showed his victory over death by rising from the dead. He removed our guilt and gave us new, unending life with God.

Question 28. How do we know that Jesus is Lord? After he died and was raised from the dead, he appeared to his disciples, both women and men. He revealed himself to them as our living Lord and Savior. Through the Bible, he continues to reveal himself to us today.

CONTRIBUTOR: Anne Camp