

4.19.2026 Easter 3

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

“Stay with us”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Among the many post-resurrection stories of Jesus, the Road to Emmaus continues to resonate with us because we are also on a journey with Jesus. The story begins late in the afternoon on Easter day, as two disciples walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a distance of about seven miles. These disciples were not among the inner circle because they returned to Jerusalem to report to the eleven and their companions, yet we know little else about them.

One of them, Cleopas, is named while the other is not. There has been speculation that perhaps they had been among the seventy sent out in pairs by Jesus in Luke, chapter 10. As a pair they may have also been a man and a woman, perhaps a husband and wife, who asked Jesus to stay with them. However, we simply do not have answers to these kinds of questions.

Yet we know that when the stranger joined them on their journey, he asked them, “*What are you discussing while you walk along?*” The stranger was asking to join them in conversation. Though they did not recognize Jesus, there must have been something compelling about him, for they answered him openly. Their entire being witnessed to their sadness as Luke writes, “*They stood still, looking sad.*” Perhaps in such a vulnerable moment while you carried a heavy burden, someone drew alongside of you and asked you how you are doing – perhaps causing tears and emotions to well up from within you. Jesus continues to enter our lives and conversations through people who care about us.

In answer to the stranger’s question, the two replied, “*Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?*” It had been the Passover, and Jerusalem would have been crowded with visitors. The stranger pressed them, asking, “*What things?*” causing them to describe Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion, saying, “*it is now the third day since these things took place.*” Their reply places the day of their journey to Emmaus on Sunday afternoon, the day of the resurrection.

The two travelers not only appeared sad, but their words also conveyed disappointment: “*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*” As they expressed a sense of lost hope, they also told an astounding story of an empty tomb and messengers who said Jesus is alive. Like them, perhaps you have experienced moments of disappointment, moments when hope seemed to have vanished, yet someone walked alongside of you, renewing your hope.

It was late on Sunday afternoon as these two walked toward the sunset, and I imagine they also felt the sun setting on their hopes for Jesus. Yet as they walked, the stranger opened their

minds to the Hebrew scriptures, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, showing that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and be glorified. The stranger made sense of things, no doubt reminding them of Isaiah's Suffering Servant who would redeem his people. Jesus continues to make sense of things as he draws alongside of us in prayer, scripture, the breaking of the bread, and fellowship with others.

Have you ever had such an Emmaus moment in your life? I am sure you have, for the faith that burns in your heart is evidence that Jesus Christ is present with you. History is filled with such moments. Paul's experience of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus is perhaps the most well-known, yet Jesus continues to meet us on the way. For example, over 1700 years later John Wesley had such an experience at a prayer meeting on May 24, 1738 at Aldersgate in London. Describing his experience, Wesley wrote,

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death. (Wesley, John, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 1:103)

What I find remarkable is that Wesley, though separated by 1700 years from those who traveled with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, experienced the grace of Jesus at a prayer meeting in London. Though he went "very unwillingly," Wesley nevertheless felt the grace of Jesus Christ entering his heart, three times removed we might say, through Martin Luther, who was commenting on Paul's Letter to the Romans, which was Paul's own witness to the grace of Jesus first received on the road to Damascus. From Jesus, to Paul, to Luther, to an unwilling John Wesley – and yet he felt his heart "strangely warmed" by grace! Has there been some time when you went reluctantly to church, perhaps because of a burden or personal struggle, only to hear again of God's love and forgiveness for you?

Have you ever had such an Emmaus moment in your life – a moment when your heart burned within you knowing Christ alive in you? I remember one such night in a small country church in Japan, named Asa Lutheran Church, where I was pastor. It was during a Thursday evening Bible class in September 1994, and we were reading from Hebrews 7 about drawing near to Jesus because he lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). As I listened to a woman named Mrs. Yamada share about how Jesus lives to help us, I was moved again to see him as the Lord of a living history that includes all of us – because he lives raised with love for the whole world. In that small church, I remember feeling Jesus' presence with me far away from the land in which I was raised, speaking through a woman in another language, nearly

2000 years after that first Easter. It was a powerful moment for me as a young pastor as I experienced Jesus alive in me, living for all people across time and space.

The two disciples said to the stranger, “*Stay with us because it is almost evening and the day is nearly over.*” “Stay with us” are powerful words of desire for fellowship with Jesus. We too might also say, “O Lord, stay with us. Kindle faith in our hearts again and help us to make sense of this broken world.” Ask him to stay by you and he will dwell in you.

Gathered around a table the stranger “*took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them,*” and their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus. Jesus is not a theology, nor is he simply an ethical teacher – Jesus Christ is the Messiah who lives raised for all people. He is the eternal Word in whom all things hold together; he is the bread of life who gives eternal life. He transcends time yet he lives in time for you and for me.

Two millennia after his resurrection, Jesus has outlasted empires, nations and leaders. He makes the weak to be strong, evil ones to do good, and the despairing to have renewed hope. His peace and love remain unchanging, and he creates community and fellowship across profound human difference – across nations, language, culture, and religion, welcoming all who call upon him.

In a few moments we will celebrate the Eucharist, and he will create one body out of many so that we become his living body in this broken world. Jesus is truly present with us in the bread and the cup!

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus says, “*Behold I stand at the door and knock, if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.*” (Rev. 3:20).

Expect him, and ask him to stay with you.

May your prayer be: “Stay with us, O Lord. Stay with me and with all people. Stay with all who suffer illness, hatred, and injustice. Stay with this broken world you so love.”

Ask him again to stay with you, and others will know him through you. Amen.