

The Road to Emmaus

Hello. I'm Marie. I've been coming to St. John's for the last four years, ever since my spouse Jonathan and I moved here so that I could attend the divinity school.

One of the lectionary readings for April 26th is Luke 24:13-35, the road to Emmaus. When I read it, I was reminded of something Paul said in his sermon on April 19th: that when the disciples were gathered in anxiety after the death of Jesus, the risen Christ still broke in among them. In Luke 24, something similar happens. Shortly after the resurrection, two followers of Jesus are walking in the evening to a village near Jerusalem. I can only imagine that they are still reeling from the death of Jesus. They have heard reports of the empty tomb, but they don't know what it means. This would not have been a happy stroll for some relaxed enjoyment of the countryside. I wonder if these two are leaving Jerusalem because they fear for their own lives there, after witnessing Jesus's brutal execution. Walking to Emmaus, they must feel exposed, worried, even devastated.

And Christ is with them there. Christ's revelation of himself in the breaking of the bread once they all reach Emmaus is a wonderful thing, of course, but even more wonderful, I think, is his presence on the road. Especially because the two don't recognize him--or they don't know that they recognize him. Once they do recognize Christ when he breaks the bread, they realize that their hearts were already burning within them when they talked with Christ on the road. On the road, they shared with him what had happened with the loss of their hoped-for Messiah, what they were worried about and devastated by, and he opened scripture to them, relaying to them God's love letter to humanity. And on the road, they also walked together.

That's an encouraging thing to me, to think that Christ is with me even when I might not know it or recognize it. I think that right now, many people are feeling exposed, worried, and devastated, and in all of this, it might be hard sometimes to feel God's presence. But that doesn't mean God is gone. God is with you now, and God doesn't require your recognition to walk beside you.

Recently, Wendy (a member of St. John's that all of you probably know) encouraged me to try reworking Scripture passages into the first person, as if they were spoken by God to me directly. What would the story of the road to Emmaus look like if it were retold as if Christ were telling it in the first person?

Out on the road and near the end of day,
I match your pace. You tell how your hope's dead
And how you fear you'll never find the way.

"I wish I knew the truth of it," you say.
"How God can let these things--" you shake your head.
"It's too hard to get by from day to day--"

You stumble and I catch you. "I can't pray,
It seems like life has been transformed to dread
And I'm afraid and lonely on the way."

I'll talk with you and when you ask, I'll stay.
I'll rest with you in light and we'll share bread.

But on this road now at the end of day,

Although my face seems strange in the cold gray,
I warm your sore heart as we walk ahead
For I'm already with you on this way,

Beside you through confusion and decay.
Soon Truth and Life will break out from the bread
But on the road here, to the end of day,
You are not lost: I am myself the Way.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you for your incarnational love for us. We thank you for your presence with us in every aspect of this life. Please give us the ability to recognize your presence. We thank you that when we cannot recognize you, your love is still unfailing and you are still with us. Amen.