

# Eyes Open Open Hearts

Luke 24:13-35

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## Luke 24:13-35

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

*As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*



Grace happens. Grace happens all the time, whether we expect it or not. Grace is happening right now. Here we are, still ruminating on the Emmaus story, and we are invited to reflect upon how grace happens.

The Emmaus story works like a magnifying glass, opening up the grace-filled opportunities of our every day experiences. We all travel from one place to another. We all find ourselves walking away from terrible life experiences. We all find life, at times, confusing, sad, hurtful, and full of pain. This story, this scripture message about two downcast and fearful disciples, one of whom – tradition tells us – was a woman, gives us an illustration of grace. These two travelers encounter grace on the road and in a roadside diner. Grace happened to them when they least expected it. That is how grace appears.

What is grace? It is an expression of God's love and forgiveness. It is awareness, an awakening that we are part of a blessed community. It is an "eye-opening" experience brought about by the working of God's Spirit. I announce, I proclaim, we are made for grace and we are agents of grace. This is the good news of Jesus Christ.

This past Thursday I attended a Clergy Seminar sponsored by Temple De Hirsch Sinai and Seattle University. The speaker was Rabbi Michael Cook, a professor in New Testament studies in a Jewish seminary. His lecture was on Jesus, specifically how Jews have understood Jesus in the past and in the present. It was a fascinating lecture and very intellectually stimulating. But I do not mention this experience because my mind was engaged. I mention it because of the context. Here we were, Jews and Christians, sitting side by side, talking about faith, about God, about who we see ourselves to be in the deepest and most profound sense. And, in my mind, I am thinking, we are not that far removed from the Holocaust, that time when Jews were systematically led to death camps by a society that identified itself as Christian. And I experienced grace.

I can tell you other stories, some as simple as listening to a young woman talk about her husband and how he has decided not to be married to her anymore and how she has found the strength to go on from her faith and her family. I can tell you about new grandchildren being born into families. I can tell you about people bringing food to church for families who will be hungry and who do not have enough money to buy food. I can tell you lots of stories about grace. But I would rather hear some of your stories right now.

## Stories

There is a song that has a chorus I would like to share with you:

*Hearts open slowly, so slowly. Unfold like the flower; Sing the songs of the dove.  
Hearts open surely, so surely. Milk and honey will flow for the hungry to love.*

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were moving away from the location of the Easter event.

Frederick Buechner has written evocatively in *The Magnificent Defeat* of the many ways we seek to find a place, an Emmaus, to run to when we have lost hope or don't know what to do, the place of escape, of forgetting, of giving up, of deadening our senses and our minds and maybe our hearts, too. He even says: "Emmaus may be going to church on Sunday." The good news is that God will find us wherever we try to hide, to run, to escape the sorrows and challenges of life. As the psalmist writes

*Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast. (Psalm 139:7-10)*

Grace happens; all the time. Let us open our eyes to grace that our hearts may be opened to one another, for this is how Christ is risen within us and around us.

Amen.