

“Walking with God”

Luke 24:13-35, 1 Peter 1:21-23 (Select Phrases)

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Prayer for Understanding Lord Jesus, we want to be people who perceive you, savor your love and grow in you, to be among those in whom the power of your hope is at work and who confess you in word and deed. Awaken us. You speak your gracious word throughout the ages. Help us hear! Amen.

Walking changes us, what happens along the way, conversations, and inner shifts yields discoveries. Disciples walking, talking, listening, questioning, and ruminating discover that the risen Christ is with us. Let us join them on their walk. A reading from the good news of Luke: **Luke 24:13-35 NLT** “**That same day two of Jesus’ followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing Jesus. Jesus asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?” They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who has not heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.” “What things?” Jesus asked. “The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,” they said. “Jesus was a prophet who did powerful miracles and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed Jesus over to be condemned to death, and they crucified Jesus. We had hoped Jesus was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. “Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.” Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! You are slow of heart to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Was not it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering glory?” Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged Jesus, “Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.” So Jesus went home with them. As they sat down to eat, Jesus took the bread and blessed it. Then Jesus broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus. And at that moment Jesus disappeared! They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us as Jesus talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, “The Lord has really risen! Jesus appeared to Peter.” Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized Jesus as he was breaking the bread.”**

Barbara Lundblad wrote: “Hopefully, you now know that this is not just a story about two disciples on the road to Emmaus two thousand years ago. There are two disciples. One was named Cleopas, and the other? The other is you. Or me. Luke left a blank space for us to fill in our own names. All our hopelessness is there on the road, every broken-down dream, every doubt we have ever had or still have. Are you waiting for a clearer revelation, for deeper assurance of Jesus’ presence in your life? I would like that, too, and some days, that assurance is as close as my own breathing. But not always. I know what Kathleen Norris means when she says, “Conversion means starting with who we are, not who we wish we were. Conversion does not offer a form of knowledge that can be quantified or neatly packaged. Conversion is best learned slowly and in community.” The journey of faith moves slowly frame by frame, most of the segments utterly ordinary. A few still photographs hold particular moments we might dare call revelation. Along the way we are sustained as they were by hearing over and over words of scripture we have heard before. Sometimes, it happens that our hearts are opened and we hear as though for the first time. Then at a table or an altar, beside a hospital bed or in a nursing home, someone takes bread, blesses and breaks it and holds it out. One of those who receives the bread is named Cleopas. And the other? You know.”

The scripture opens on the afternoon of the resurrection. These two disciples are not celebrating, they are leaving. They are not walking toward anything. They are walking away. They have seen enough. They are walking away from hope with dashed expectations. It is sad to hear someone say, "We had hoped ..." It hurts. Sometimes our hope implodes, the reality we thought was coming into focus crashes and we are now facing an alternative reality that is grim and gloomy. The disciples' words reveal grief, disappointment, and confusion. Emmaus is the road of disillusionment. Scripture gives us a voyeuristic view into their struggle. And since we have been there, walking in their sandals trying to shake out the pebbles that irritate the soles of our feet and the soul of our being, scripture invites us to be curious prayer walkers.

Jesus is about to transform their walk of disappointment away, into a trek toward something. The steady pace of walking gives space to process grief, wrestle with lost hope, reflection and remembering what matters most. Putting one foot in front of the other helps us carry sorrow. Movement on the outside mirrors movement on the inside. With each step, some of the weight begins to shift. Walking opens us to grace. When we travel slowly, we notice things we would otherwise speed past, the kindness of a stranger, the beauty of a wildflower, the quiet whisper of God. Pilgrimage is a way of embodying longing. When we walk toward something sacred, we are saying with our bodies, "I do not fully understand it and I am willing to go there, step by step." Pilgrimage is faith in motion, hope with blisters, and love stretched out over miles. Cleopas and you, his sibling, do not know you are on a pilgrimage. And all of life is a pilgrimage. The resurrected Jesus is always with us. It is common to not recognize Jesus much of the time. Often, we do not recognize Grace until we have traveled alongside God for a while. Jesus listens. God hears our every word. God is not like that misguided person who rushes to correct you, tells you what to do and tries to fix you. Jesus does not interrupt. Jesus lets us pour out whatever is in our hearts including confusion, dashed hopes, grief, and anger. Jesus always gives us the gift of being heard, seen and fully know. Jesus makes space for the disciples to say everything that is on their minds, even when they get the story wrong and their perspective is clouded. Jesus listens with patience and compassion. When we are all talked out Jesus speaks stories of resurrection, grace, forgiveness, healing, transformation, and Easter. When the disciples stop to share a meal cultivating community they recognize God, seeing God in each other, tasting the nourishment of life, drinking the living water of joy, and discovering the love of abundant life. When we perceive God it is a gift to share our divine experience with another.

Thomas Merton wrote: "Our goal is to find "places of resurrection". A journey to a mysterious, unknown, and divinely appointed place where we meet with God. We go on pilgrimage to feel again the porous borders between our inner and outer lives and discover a marvelous or magical view of the world."

Douglas Brouwer explains that traveling creates change that augments spiritual growth writing. "Change is the traveler's fourth dimension."

Prayer is making space to receive from God. Jesus taught to let go of worry and fear, live in the present, be grateful, give your entire attention to God and let God carry some of your burden by making space for the unforced rhythms of grace.

Most prayers have a technique to make space for God. Centering prayer uses breathing. The examen reflects on the day's highs and lows so one can release them and be blessed. The labyrinth is a pilgrimage that lets go on the inward journey, rests to receive from God at the center and lets come on the outward journey. Other forms of prayer such as journaling, creating art and making music enables one to pour out their gifted creativity so they are open to observe God.

Pastor John Ackerman, my spiritual director, suggests prayerfully making space through Stop, Look, Listen. Stop, breathe in and out, focusing on the Spirit's presence as the breath of life. Look, reflect, thanking God for gifts, acknowledging struggles, confessing failures, and asking God for whatever is needed for the day to come. Listen, observe goodness, or read scripture, listen for God to speak to your particular context.

Pastor Eugene Peterson explains prayer as making space to be in touch with God writing. "We can go on "automatic", filling slots, showing up for activities, and even enjoying one another's fellowship, without nurturing a vital spiritual life. Because activity can so easily substitute for a relationship with God, we believe we are fulfilling God's purpose when we are simply keeping busy. When we learn to listen to God we are formed into a relationship with God which is a supportive environment for discernment."

Pastor Marlene Kropf encourages us to make space with five movements. Mary writes: "Prayer means turning away from distracting clutter, waiting long enough to get our bearings, and then giving our full attention to God's guiding presence. Prayer embodies God's radical vision of grace-filled hospitality. The first movement

is engaging God.” Mary quotes from Pastor Frederick Schmidt: “I questions are driven by the need for self-actualization and a sense of entitlement, whereas God-questions point us to the task of distinguishing the presence of God at work in the world from other competing voices in an effort to determine where God is moving.” Mary continues: “The second movement is emptying ourselves. The third movement is encountering our past and present. The fourth movement is examining new possibilities. The Fifth movement is embarking in a new direction.”

Or simply make space by walking. Pour out everything in your mind and heart, listen, receive, let God transform you and walk forward with expanding love. You are invited to go for a walk with Cleopas. Talk about all that is happening in the world and in your life. Reflect on God’s love in the world. Enjoy a meal with a friend. Open your mind’s eye and you will likely perceive God. Share your God sighting. Rejoice and move forward with love.

Or let grace do all the work. Peter preached. **1 Peter 1:21-23 NLT Select Phrases “God raised Christ from the dead and gave Jesus great glory. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.”** By God’s grace all is being resurrected. We are all becoming Easter people. Amen

