

**Sermon: Third Sunday of Easter (a) April 19, 2026**

**Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher**

**Text: Acts 2:14a, 36-41, Luke 24:13-35**

Once, during a discussion with my colleagues about today's gospel reading, one pastor remarked that it's hard to know **what time** it is in all these Sundays after Easter. That **first** Easter day seems to stretch on **forever** as week after week **several** gospel writers vie to tell as many stories as possible of the risen Jesus appearing to his disciples from Jerusalem to Galilee. In a way, it's the **up** side of the dilemma that forms the plot of the movie, "Groundhog Day", where the main character is stuck living the same day over and over again.

**Christians**, by contrast, **never** can get **enough** of Easter. Nor does God **mean** us to. Because living in the light of the resurrection affords us the grace to see ourselves **growing into** Easter, growing in our understanding of what Easter **means** and what Easter **does** for living faith and faithful living. **Still**, hearing so **many** of these appearance stories can make **today's** gospel story look like just one more variation on the theme or, **worse yet**, just one more attempt to prove that Jesus lives again despite his death and burial.

But the truth is **today's** gospel is so much **more**. The Emmaus story -- which **one** Bible teacher, Reginald Fuller, has called "the most beautiful of the appearance stories" -- is a resurrection appearance tailor-made for **you and me**, for people who **know** we are ordinary, for people who often seem to take the **long** road home to faith and hope, for people who, like Cleopas' **friend**, don't **ever** expect to have **our** names recorded in the annals of faith. The truth in today's Gospel is a stunning revelation of God's persistence, patience, and absolute faithfulness, expressed **not** in coercion or argument, but in accompaniment and self-giving. It reveals a God who can never stay very far away from God's people, who **continually** draws close, **especially** at those moments and places that find us most needy, most

vulnerable, most lost. Ours is a God, Luke wants us to know, who can be counted on to meet us at the breaking points of our lives and who is revealed precisely in **being broken**...broken for you and me and for the whole world.

Luke shows us this in a variety of ways. When this story is translated from the Greek, lots of “-ing” words show up in English at the **front** end of the story – words like “going,” “talking,” and “discussing.” These are the writer’s way of getting us to picture Cleopas and friend engaged in an intense and protracted discussion while making their way down the road. Weighed down with their thoughts and with their sadness, they’re almost “**slouching** along” toward Emmaus, shoulders drooping, feet dragging, feeling more and more in the dark – and **not just** because sunset was approaching.

Now it wasn’t as though they couldn’t recite the events of the past days. Because when **Jesus** approaches and asks what they’re discussing **so** intently, Cleopas gives a **very good** summary of what’s happened. He speaks of Jesus as “a prophet mighty in deed and word”; he speaks of the arrest and crucifixion; he **even** speaks about the empty tomb, the angels’ message, and the women’s testimony. But for Cleopas and friend, the story leads to a dead end. And telling and retelling the story only serves to underscore their loss. It is only at the breaking point, when night is about to fall, only when Jesus breaks open the scriptures and breaks bread at the table that Cleopas suddenly hears the very story **he himself** told in a **new** way, when the history he **himself** recited to Jesus is newly invested with faith and with hope.

Yet Jesus doesn’t rush the disciples. It’s true, he **doesn’t** let things rest; he **isn’t** content to leave his companions in a muddle of despair. But Jesus takes his time; he questions and discusses. He **doesn’t** simply tell them “the answer” as though **that** would make them believe. Because faith is not the result of adding two plus two and getting four, even theologically. Jesus just keeps on walking and talking **with them**

**all the way** to Emmaus; he walks with them through the scriptures, just as he walks with them down the road. In accompanying them, he adopts **their** pace. And when they reach the place they'd **planned** to stop, he **does not insist** on being invited in. But **by then**, you see, he **doesn't have to**. Because his words and his presence, though as yet unrecognized, make them reluctant to let him go; so he accepts their invitation to stay the night...and returns their hospitality in far greater measure. Having encouraged his companions to reveal their need and their longing, he satisfies their desire and fills their need. He does this at the table, in the taking, blessing, breaking, and giving of the bread, the same way he fed 5000, the same way he fed his **friends** on the night he was betrayed. It is, if you will, his **signature card** and it was not lost on Cleopas and his friend. It caused them to remember and in remembering to recognize and to believe. Jesus then vanished from their sight – though not from their midst. And so, their hearts still burning within them, “...they got up and **returned** to Jerusalem” to share **their** good news with the eleven and their companions and to hear the stories **the others, too**, were bursting to tell. Suddenly everything had changed. Darkness gave way to light. Sadness lifted and faith took feet. What 1 Peter speaks of is **what they experienced**: “You have been born anew...through the living and enduring word of God.”

We know a **little** of what happened to at least **some** of the famous eleven. We read it in the book of Acts, the sequel to Luke's gospel. But Cleopas and his friend are **never** mentioned again. And so we **cannot** know what acts of witness were **particularly** theirs. But this we **do know**. There is never just **one** Emmaus road. That experience continues to happen over and over again, even for those who long ago committed their lives to Christ. Faith doesn't exempt us from the struggle, doesn't guarantee we won't turn a corner in the road of our lives and lose sight of the One we pledged to follow and serve. And baptism doesn't mean we will not sometimes find ourselves deeply questioning what it all means, this faith we confess. What baptism and

faith **do mean** is that we have God's promise that we won't be left to wander the Emmaus road alone. Even when we are headed in the very opposite direction, we will find Jesus nearer to us than we know...whenever the word is spoken, wherever the bread is broken...in the Jerusalem of the church, but also on the outskirts, in Emmaus-es far-flung, in places and circumstances where we least expect him or where he is **no longer** expected. The resurrection gives us the right and the reason to trust that Jesus will come to us and show himself to us, so that we might continue to set our faith and hope on God. Look! It's happening **again** today...right here and right now!

So this is good news for us, but it cannot **stop** with us. It's a message we are called to share with brothers and sisters in the church and with brothers and sisters who have no church, with everyone who believes they are walking alone, without help, without hope. The story bears repeating, the bread and cup are waiting to be shared, and new life is available for **all**. So whom will **you** invite to join you on the road? If Christ has set **your** heart burning within you, go, go, go and share the Good News that Jesus walks with us, especially with those who feel despised and forgotten right now. Friends, don't let the fire go out! Go, go, go...and, as the angels always say, don't be afraid, for Jesus will be right beside you. Amen.