

# THE TABLE AT THE INN

## At the Table Series (Part 7) | Luke 24:13-33

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Hello and Happy Easter! I'm Dan Meyer and I'm honored to be talking with you on this special weekend. How many of you have been to an Easter service before? Ooh, we've got a lot in common! I've been to quite a few of these myself. Have you noticed that we almost always hear the same story? The women go to the tomb on Easter morning; they find it empty and learn that Jesus has risen from the dead. Or sometimes we hear how the risen Lord meets Mary, or Peter or John or Thomas and surprises them.

Those are great and important stories, but we're not going to play those tunes today. The passage we're going to explore instead is one of those deep cut tracks in the Easter playlist. It usually gets saved for the Sunday AFTER Easter (when one or two of us *might not* normally be here) so I thought it would be interesting to listen to this part of the Easter story today. Listen to what the gospel-writer, Luke tells us...

<sup>13</sup> **Now that same day** – it's Easter Sunday, but in the afternoon -- **two of them** – that means two of the followers of Jesus -- **were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles northwest from Jerusalem.** We'll learn in a moment that these aren't any of the *famous* disciples. One of them is a guy named, "Cleopas," the male version of the female name "Cleopatra." Great baby name, by the way. Just in case you're looking! I think it's curious that the Bible leaves out the other traveler's name. I've sometimes wondered if that was so it would be easier for us insert ourselves into this story, sort of like one of those photo-ops at the zoo or park where you put your head through the cut-out hole and take your place in some famous scene.

I say this because I am struck by how like US these two people turn out to be. For one thing, <sup>14</sup> **They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.** This is what we normal people do, right? As we go along in life, we kibitz with each other about the latest happenings. *What do you make of the results of the Chicago election? How do you think Trump's indictment is going to affect things? Did you catch the new episode of Succession or the Voice or watch that video?* Life is interesting and confusing and scary and wacky at times. In a word, life is COMPLEX. It helps to have good people with whom to process it.

I've been texting back and forth this week with people I love about a pair of very serious health crises in my family. These people can't SOLVE these problems right now, but it really helps me that I can SHARE them with them. Do you have a **Cleo** in your life? Someone you can vent with and tell the truth to and just process **everything that [has] happened?** I want you to know that you can find those kind of friends and fellow disciples HERE.

The story goes on: <sup>15</sup> **As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them...** Where do you picture Jesus IS right now? Maybe you picture him as still in the grave. Perhaps you see him as stuck in the pages of the Bible or a Sunday School picture book. Maybe you think of Jesus as away in some distant heaven. But Jesus told his disciples: **"I will be with you always"** (Matt 28:20). Jesus isn't confined to living in a box or a book or someplace beyond. Easter answers the question: *Where is Jesus right now?* The answer is: Jesus is **walking along with YOU**, wherever you are. He doesn't just care about religious places. He cares about regular places -- about the roads you walk and the school you go to and the job you have. Jesus wants to companion you in those places and to experience the powerful grace and truth and love he has for you.

And then the Easter story gives us another amazing insight. Luke tells us that Jesus was with those two disciples on the road <sup>16</sup> **but they were kept from recognizing him.** That fact provokes an interesting question: *Could that be true of us? Could Jesus Christ, the risen and living Lord, actually be with us but we do not recognize Him?*

Some years ago, I performed the wedding of a wonderful couple in this community. At the reception they kindly sat me next to Bill, the Father of the Bride, and we struck up a conversation. We talked about the wedding and the weather and all that had happened in the country lately. But what made this afternoon unusual was that -- at a level most people do not -- Bill asked me all kinds of questions about *myself*. I'm usually the person pulling other people out; but over the next hour or two, Bill drew out my whole life story. He gained access to hurts and hopes I hadn't put words to before. There was something so steady, curious, and empathetic about Bill that I just opened up.

And then, slowly, the datapoints I was able to glean about HIM began to sparkle. Bill lived outside Washington D.C. He'd been to Kennebunkport. He knew a lot about public affairs and was *amazing* at asking questions. The bride's maiden name was Webster. And, at last, I connected the dots. My gracious companion was William H. Webster, the only person in American history to have ever been the Director of the FBI and then of the CIA. But I'd been so locked in *my stuff*, I hadn't recognized him.

The Stranger on the Emmaus Road was someone infinitely *greater* than William Webster. Yet He, too, was gracious and patient. <sup>17</sup> **He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"** What's on your mind? What's troubling your hearts? Tell me about your life. **They stood still, their faces downcast.** The Traveler had struck a nerve. Like we sometimes do when we're troubled and someone presses in, <sup>18</sup> **One of them, named Cleopas, lashed out defensively and asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"** <sup>19</sup> **"What things?" [the Stranger] asked.**

**"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.** <sup>20</sup> **The chief priests and our**

**rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel** – which in the mindset of most Jews meant that he would be a military and political Messiah. He would throw out the Roman occupiers, restore Israel to its glory days as under King David, and give us the power and prosperity we deserve. **And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."**

Let me pause there and invite you to go back to verse 21. It's the one that reads: **But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel** [in THIS way]. Linger for a moment on that simple and very human phrase, **"but we had hoped that..."** Have you ever felt that? How often has the pain, confusion or discouragement that besets our spirit or relationships been a product of the fact that reality does not line up with what **we had hoped**. I had hoped that you would conform more to my expectations as a spouse. I had hoped that you would be a kid more like me or less like me. We had hoped that you would add more of these qualities to our team. I had hoped that if I was good in these ways, you would reward me in this way. I had hoped that my life story would go this way. We had hoped, God, that you would do it Our Way.

It's hard to be people who are so wise and so competent and so all-seeing and so good that we know how things ought to be and should proceed. It is harder still to surrender our trust to GOD – to the One who might have a bigger and a better plan. I don't believe God wants to squash our hopes or ignores our hurts. I actually believe that God answers every prayer you and I make. Sometimes he says YES. Sometimes he says WAIT. Sometimes he says, I have something BETTER going on. This, I think is what Jesus sought to impart to these disciples on the Emmaus Road.

**<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And [so] beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**

The Old Testament prophets had been abundantly clear that the kind of Messiah God was planning to send was not a military conqueror but a spiritual transformer. He would be a suffering servant not a dominating master. The Messiah would be a person of unique moral purity, whose sacrificial death upon a cross (see Psalm 22) would pay the price for human sin, open up the path for human beings to be reunited with God, and display for all of us the beauty and goodness of the kingdom for which all of us have been made. The vast majority of Israel resisted this understanding of redemption.

Even Christ's own disciples were stuck on the health, wealth, power-for-me thing. It's still so easy for any of us to get stuck on what **we had hoped**, instead of the greater good that GOD has revealed through Jesus Christ.

There are so many times in my life where things have not aligned with MY WAY or what I had hoped. This past month alone, my brilliant younger brother has been diagnosed with cancer and my beautiful niece with heart failure, needing a transplant. She's in her twenties! I pray for the amazing medical community of our time to do their great work. But, come what may, I believe in a Redeemer. I believe in a Lord utterly capable of working all things for the good in these circumstances. I believe in a Savior who – even if my loved ones die – can resurrect them one day to a LIFE that will make this one look a bug's life. I believe this because of EASTER -- because Jesus so clearly died on the cross and so obviously rose again.

There is no explanation for the rise of the Christian Church without the resurrection being true. Why do we believe it is true? First, because His enemies never recovered his corpse, though they had every incentive to find it, if it could be found. Secondly, because the sight of the graveclothes that WERE recovered converted the people who saw them. They looked like a chrysalis that a supernatural life had simply passed through. Thirdly, because Jesus was subsequently seen not only by Mary and the Apostles and these two on the Emmaus Road, but by more than 500 additional people. And, finally, because their lives were changed. People who'd cowered behind locked doors, who'd denied Jesus afraid of arrest, became willing to die agonizing deaths, rather than renounce the Truth that Jesus is LORD of life and life beyond this life.

**<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening..." So he went in to stay with them.**

We're out of time, so let me leave you with these takeaways. First, dare to believe that the risen Jesus is truly walking with you on the road of your life. Secondly, know that, as GREAT as He is, He is very interested in YOU and your story. Thirdly, remember that what you HOPE for and the way you'd like to see life play out, may not actually be the best way. Trust in God's plan. Don't let your fixed frame about the way things ought to be stop you from recognizing that Jesus is truly there and at work for ultimate good in your life. Fourthly, like those disciples on the Emmaus Road, invite Jesus to STAY with you. The gospel accounts make clear that Jesus does not FORCE himself on anyone. He will reach out to all of us. But He'll only stay with those who ask for His fellowship. I encourage you to pray today: *"Jesus, I invite you into my life to be not just my Easter Contact but my Everyday Companion."*

And, finally, think about your next encounter with Jesus AT THE TABLE. Luke 24 concludes by saying: **<sup>30</sup> When he was AT THE TABLE with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were**

opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.  
<sup>32</sup> They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" <sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together.

I want to note, in conclusion today, that Jesus reveals himself in a very special (as in *can't-find-it-elsewhere*) way **AT THE TABLE** of his Church. It was when Cleopas and his partner broke bread with Jesus and he opened the scriptures to them that they recognized Him. If you want to SEE JESUS and benefit more from his grace, truth, and love, come back to Christ's Table. This is where God's scriptures get opened up every week. This is where we find amazing companions for life and we learn together what it looks like to follow Jesus in a complex world.

When their 27-year-old son Matthew took his own life after battling mental illness for years, Rick and Kay Warren (authors of the best-selling book in history after the Bible) said this: "*We've often been asked: 'How have you made it? How have you kept going?' We've replied: The answer is Easter. The death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus happened over three days. FRIDAY was the day of suffering and pain and agony. SATURDAY was the day of doubt and confusion and misery. But Easter—that SUNDAY—was the day of hope and joy and victory. And here's the fact [they said]: You will face these three days over and over in your lifetime. When you do, you'll find yourself asking three [key] questions. One: 'What do I do in my days of pain?' Two: 'How do I get through my days of doubt and confusion?' Three: 'How do I get to the days of joy and victory?' The answer is Easter.*"<sup>1</sup> And life with Easter People.

So, come back next Sunday as we start a fabulous new series from God's Word together. Because Christ – the great companion on life's road – is risen. He is risen indeed and eager to walk with YOU. And you'll find the relationships you need to follow Him in a complex world AT THE TABLE of his church more than anywhere else.

Thanks for coming today. Happy Easter to you. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Hope* (Zondervan, 2015), pp. 56-57