



**VILLAGE  
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

# Open-Eyed, Wide-Eyed Christianity

SCRIPTURE:  
Luke: 24:13-32

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May 1, 2022 — Sermon by Rev. Sally S. Wright

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**H**ow do you know when Jesus shows up? How do any of us know? This is the exact question this story is trying to help us answer.

This story is one of Jesus' few post-resurrection appearances. A time when Jesus showed himself to his followers after he rose from the dead on Easter morning but before he ascended to heaven. This passage is a great story and one of my favorites but it is fraught with historical and academic problems.

First, let's start by talking about Emmaus. We don't really know where it is. Okay, scripture tells us it is about seven miles outside of Jerusalem. Probably within a day's walk from Jerusalem. There are scholars who have spent their entire careers trying to identify where Emmaus is. They have come up with some pretty great educated guesses. Yet the truth is: No one really knows.

Second, let's talk about Cleopas. He's not really mentioned anywhere else in scripture. Is he real? Is he not? We don't really know; scholars don't know. But he is mentioned here.

Third, this passage is only found in the gospel of Luke. Matthew, Mark and John had nothing to say about Cleopas, a friend and a stranger on the road to Emmaus.

But we're not reading this story because we are biblical or historical scholars. We are reading this story to discover what God is saying to us. It seems to me Luke wrote this passage to share a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. Yet, I wonder if this story is actually a glimpse into how the early church was wrestling with our same question: How do we know when Jesus shows up?

The book of Luke was written toward the end of the first century after the fall of the second temple in Jerusalem. The author of Luke is not only con-

cerned with a telling of the story of Jesus Christ. The author is also concerned with addressing the important social and theological issues of the early Christian church.

I wonder if we can go back and look at this 'Walk to Emmaus' text differently—not through a historical lens, but rather, as an example of what the Christian walk of faith is like and how we are to participate in that walk together. Let's start again.

Two guys are walking somewhere and on the way, they meet someone who asks them, "What are you talking about?" So, they tell him the story of Jesus' life and death. Once they get to where they are going, the guys invite this traveler to eat with them, and it is in the breaking of the bread that Jesus reveals himself. Afterward, they all reflect on when it was they felt Jesus' presence.

Just like the two travelers, Cleopas and his friend, we might encounter Jesus and not know it. We might encounter Jesus in the telling of the story. We might encounter Jesus in breaking bread. We might encounter Jesus by reflecting upon when it was that we may have encountered Jesus.

I wonder if the 'Walk to Emmaus' story is offering us an affirmation that searching for the post-resurrection Jesus is always a journey and never a destination. Jesus could always be the lone traveler on the road—or the other parent in the pick-up line. Jesus could be the person experiencing homelessness on the street corner or the friend we need to invite to dinner, but are too busy to. Jesus could be the one we are telling the story of Jesus to. Jesus could always be the one we didn't know was there until we reflect.

I think if we are real with each other and with God, this is what our Christian walk of faith is really like. There have been times when we didn't know Jesus was going to be present—and yet, he was.

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This happened to me just last weekend. I had the honor of spending one whole day and night out at Heartland Center with 60 of our Presbyterian Women. You would think that having a night alone in a room by myself was enough to make me see Jesus... but wait, there's more.

On Saturday morning, after breakfast, I was tasked with leading the dreaded ice-breakers. I had a whole plan to help these 60 women meet each other, starting off with light conversation, then working into deep and meaningful stuff. It was going to be great. So, I asked each woman there to pick one of the two pieces of candy on the table: Kit-Kat or Reese's. Then, I simply asked each woman to find someone who had the other type of candy and it had to be someone they didn't know. I said, "Go." They walked around the room and found each other and started to talk.

Do you know that I tried to interrupt them four times? I tried four times to give them the other directions on how to talk to each other. By the fourth unsuccessful try, I could feel the Holy Spirit bop me upside the head and say, "Sally, Jesus is here among these women connecting, story-telling. My presence is among each of these conversations."

Jesus showed up. So, I just let the women talk with each other for 25 minutes. It is almost as if Jesus decides when and where and how he wants to show up for his post-resurrection appearances.

But, I think the 'Walk to Emmaus' passage also reminds us that there are things that we do to facilitate our own recognition of Jesus' presence among us. In the story, Cleopas and his friend tell the story, invite the traveler in, share a meal and then reflect. These are the same actions that we do when we gather as a church. We invite people in, we tell them the story, we share a meal and we reflect. It is in these actions, that we do over and over and over again, that we begin to understand and see the ways that Jesus reveals himself among us.

I came across a silly and poignant passage from author Anne Lamott that describes the importance of doing the simple things in the hopes that Jesus might be present. Listen now to her words. Anne writes, "So, I show up and teach Sunday School

two days after the Newton shootings. I didn't over-think what I would say, because I always end up telling the kids the same things: that they are loved and chosen, that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it; and to keep trusting in God, no matter what things look like and no matter how long an upswing takes. If something awful has occurred, I ask the kids at Sunday school if they want to talk about what happened or if they would rather make art. One-hundred percent of the time they would rather make art... Then we pray to try to be good and kind to one another. We read a short passage of scripture, talk about it and try to learn something together about our lives and God's love. And then, as in all great religious traditions, we overeat."<sup>1</sup>

Whether you are in Anne Lamott's Sunday school class or on your own journey with Cleopas to Emmaus, it is powerful to be reminded that God chooses to show up and reveal in God's own way at God's own time. No matter how confusing or annoying it is to us. These disciples did not know they were talking to Jesus, the risen one. All they knew is that they met someone who did not know the story of Jesus and they told it to him. Then they invited him in and gave him some food. And in that moment, they realized that it was Jesus.

I didn't think that Jesus would show up during the ice-breakers, of all times, at the PW retreat. I mean, we were going to have communion later in the day... Jesus could have chosen that time, too. And Anne Lamott reminds us that we just need to keep telling the story, reflecting upon God's love, make art and eat. These are the ways we begin to see Jesus present in our own lives and in our world.

The good news is that we always need to be on the lookout for the resurrected Jesus on the loose in the world. We do not get to control when and where Jesus shows up. We may not even know it has happened. But, when it does, reflect upon it and keep telling the story.

We are to always be on the lookout for Jesus in our midst. Let us live out our faith with eyes wide open on the chance, the mere chance, that we can catch a glimpse of Jesus in a story someone is tell-

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1 Anne Lamott, *Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope, and Repair* (2013), p.15.

ing us, or in an invitation, or even in a meal. Jesus is in our midst revealing wonderful things. So, where will you catch a glimpse of Jesus?

We pray all these things in the name of the God who rolled the stone away and shows up in unexpected ways, promises abounding hope to all. Amen.