

April 19, 2026—The Third Sunday of Easter
The Rev. James Wyatt

On the Road

I spent a lot of time on the road this week. Seven ferry crossings and one long drive around through Tacoma, plus all the driving to and from the ferry terminals to get to my office in Renton adds up to about 12 hours of travel. So I found myself thinking as I sat on the ferry on Friday, about what this story would look like in the context of my hour-and-a-half, 36-mile commute to Renton instead of the disciples' hour-and-a-half, 7-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Of course, we don't talk to strangers on the road when each of us is neatly contained in our own individual cars. The ferry's a little different though, isn't it? One day the week before last I happened to spot Bob on the ferry and ended up talking with him for the length of the half-hour crossing. So I can almost imagine it happening like that: Cleopas and his companion, sitting on the ferry or the train or the bus "talking with each other about all these things that had happened," and not really noticing the stranger who was close enough to overhear. For whatever reason, they didn't recognize him as the very person they were talking about, even when he inserted himself in to their conversation: "What are you discussing with each other?"

You know, I'm actually kind of amazed that they told him the truth. I mean, politics and religion are the two topics you're supposed to avoid in polite conversation with strangers, and this discussion revolved around both topics: Jesus was "a prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people," and "we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel"—that is, to deliver Israel from its subjugation and oppression at the hand of the Romans. So this guy they think is a stranger inserts himself into their conversation, and they just come right out and say that they hold some pretty unpopular and potentially dangerous religious and political opinions. Oh, and then there's the part about the women's vision of angels. I expect a lot of strangers, at that point, would be sorry they had asked and would quickly move to another part of the ferry.

Instead, this stranger pokes fun at them: "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" And for the rest of the journey, he explains it all to them, setting their hearts on fire as they come to understand, ultimately, that the women's story is true, that Jesus's brutal crucifixion was not the end of the story, but the beginning of a whole new chapter.

And still they don't recognize him. But clearly they know there is something extraordinary going on. Their hearts burning in their chests tell them that the things this guy is telling them are important and true and holy. And so as the ferry pulls in to the terminal or the train whines to a stop in the station, they're not ready to say goodbye. "Hey, look, it's getting late," they say, "come and stay with us." I can't really imagine inviting a stranger from the ferry to come and stay at my house, but it's not that far-fetched to imagine saying, "Hey, do you want to continue this conversation over dinner?"

So that's what they did. And as they reclined at the table together Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And that's the moment, finally, when they recognized him.

So here's the thing: I know that the Gospel of Luke has chosen words very carefully here, using the same words at this meal that were used to describe the Last Supper—the same words I say over the bread every Sunday: "Jesus *took* bread, and when he had given thanks to [God]," that is, *blessed* it, "he broke it, [and] *gave* it to his friends." And I chose our fraction anthem for this Easter season—"the disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread"—specifically to connect our celebration of the Eucharist to the beauty of this story. And I really believe what I have said many times up here: that the Eucharist is one of the most reliable ways that God works to transform us because we encounter Jesus there. All that is true and important and good.

And I have often said that the meals Jesus shared with his disciples during his earthly ministry probably looked a lot more like a group of friends gathered around a game and a pizza, like a board game night or a D&D game, than like our celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is one way we can encounter Jesus, but it is not the only way. Some weeks you might meet Jesus very powerfully in the stillness at the altar rail. But other weeks you might meet him just as powerfully during coffee hour or at the dinner table or in a random conversation with a stranger on the ferry.

One of the things I love about Episcopal theology is the emphasis we place on sacramentality—not just the central place of the sacraments in our worship together, but the idea that all of life can be sacramental—that the divine breaks through all the time into the midst of everyday, ordinary life. Sharing a family dinner can be sacramental. Gathering with dear friends to play a game or watch a game and laugh together can be sacramental. Any table—not just this Holy Table, but the tables in the parish hall, a dinner table, a coffee table, or a gaming table—can be an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of the heavenly table, a place where God comes and reclines with God’s beloved people, sharing God’s own self with us and knitting us together into the Body of Christ.

That’s what I love about this story. This is Luke’s first narrative about the resurrection, and it isn’t about triumph and glory, it isn’t about angelic trumpets and shouts of alleluia. It’s about friends walking and talking together, extending hospitality to a stranger, and discovering in that interaction, that relationship, a new fire of hope burning in their hearts. In a world that highlights the very worst that humanity can muster, that plasters corruption all over the news and centers violence and death in its stories; in a world that values productivity and usefulness and profit margins and rewards overwork and consumption; in a world that can seem so ugly—here is this story of resurrection beauty. Here Cleopas and his partner find their shattered hopes pieced back together and their broken hearts alive with holy fire, thanks to a long walk, a kind stranger, and a shared meal. It is a simple story, a beautiful story, and one that we can all participate in.

“Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.” (BCP p. 124)