

“**The Message**” Translation. Luke 24: 13-16 that same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about 7 miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation going over all these things that happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

17-18 he asked “what’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They just stood there long faced like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said “are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

9-24 He said “what has happened?” They said “the things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with a story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty, just as the women said but they didn’t see Jesus.

25-27 Then he said to them “so thickheaded. So slow hearted. Why can’t you simply believe all that the Prophets said?” Don’t you see that these things had to happen that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?” Then he started at the beginning with the books of Moses and went on through all the prophets, pointing out everything in the scriptures that referred to him.

28-31 they came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on, but they pressed him “stay and have supper with us. It’s nearly evening, the day is done. “So he went in with them. And here is what happened. he sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

32 back-and-forth day talked. Didn’t we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road as he opened up the scripture for us?

33-34. They didn’t waste a minute. they were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the 11 and their friends gathered together talking away. “it’s really happened. the Master has been raised up. Simon saw him.”

35 then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

After reading Luke, I found myself with more questions than answers. As many of you know, especially those on Vestry, as we **consider the dwindling members throughout Christianity**, the idea of “fresh expressions worship” has been on the mind of our bishops and diocese, **and all Christians everywhere, especially these last few years.** What do we do now? This week, I got a letter from: *Chris Backert*, National Director, Fresh Expressions USA. He asked: “Martin, are you feeling eager to ‘get back to normal’?” I answered, “What do you mean by normal?” Because it’s impossible to know how this quarantine is going to end. Most likely, it will be a little different for all of us, depending on our states, our cities, and the needs of our families. All church leaders are people, and people in the pew are people, and it’s reasonable to think, “I wish things **could** go back to normal!”

I wonder: what if God has something better in mind? The church in North America has been struggling in “maintenance mode” for too long. Before we got to this crisis, some of us may remember the first two classes I held Sunday evenings on “Embracing Emergence Christianity.” [What happens when the church has a giant rummage sale?] Well, I thought, “Maybe quarantine will give us a new opportunity: The chance to “reset” our congregations and ministries; the chance to join God’s mission in new ways we never imagined. Let me say that again: We have a chance to “reset” our churches, to join God’s mission in new ways we never imagined.

Our vestry retreat this year was on the theme of the book, “Canoeing the Mountains”, the story of Lewis and Clark, and when Thomas Jefferson [my favorite President], sent them out to canoe all the way to the Pacific Ocean. And, well, many of us geographers know, it can’t be done. So, what do we do when we run out of rivers and our Rocky Mountains hits us **right in the face**, as it did to Lewis and Clark? Ouch. Well, we adjust, we adapt, we become adjusted to new conditions, we make something suitable for a new use or purpose, like when hospitals had to adapt their response to this virus. It is a little like Cleopas and his friend had to do when they met Jesus on the way. “What do we do now, Cleopas?” “I don’t know, my friend”, said Cleopas [Luke doesn’t tell us the other’s name]; “Jesus is gone and what do we do now?” Whoever he or she is, she or he is as upset as the 12 disciples turned 11.

I read an article this week by Jeffrey Gallagher; he raised some interesting questions for me. Cleopas is not one of the disciples. We know this because he's not listed in Luke's list of disciples along with the fact that when he leaves Emmaus to return to Jerusalem, he finds the 11 there [no Judas, of course] s-o-o-o, who is Cleopas? His story comes right after Peter has gone to the tomb and found it empty. So, Cleopas must be in the inner circle. Word hasn't had time to spread farther, and Luke says that two of them are going to Emmaus. The disciples were instructed by Jesus to go out by twos, so are there more than 12 disciples? Is this another band of followers? Whoever Cleopas is, he's as upset as the 12 become 11. And who's with Cleopas? His wife? Perhaps!

And Luke, of all the gospel writers would likely have made it known that there was a female disciple. On the other hand, there almost had to be. All those men journeying **without any women?** Could all those men really handle things on their own? And would they really have left their kids and spouses at home? This isn't saying they left everything behind; it's just a literary device by LUKE to suggest that they did in fact "give-up-a-lot-to-follow-Jesus" They couldn't have left **everything**, right?

When Cleopas and his companion returned to Jerusalem, the 11 are there with their companions, spouses, friends, more disciples! Luke never tells. And where do they go? Emmaus, of course. And we don't know where that is. [I know where Emmaus, Pennsylvania is; such a great town!, and Bethlehem, PA?; and Little Hell, VA., on the Eastern Shore?] Yet interestingly, Cleopas and his companion seemed to have arranged for a place to stay since they urged Jesus to "stay with us". Do they live in Emmaus? Is this another place to where the gospel has spread?; another place that is going to be devastated by Jesus' death? Are Cleopas and his companion going back to life as they knew it? [and isn't this what many of us want to do now?]

Would the next day mean fishing or tax collecting, since following Jesus didn't work out so well? I believe, it's worth some reflection, as is the phrase "came near." "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near." [In the midst of all our present suffering and disappointment and fear, don't we all want Jesus to "come near, and don't we want Jesus to be here?"] This should call to mind another phrase: "the Kingdom of God has come near." Jesus just said these very words a few chapters earlier when he told the disciples to go out in twos and Cleopas and his companion are doing just that. So now they just need to remember that when they are welcomed and cure the sick, the Kingdom of God comes near. God's hopes and God's dreams for the world come near, even today and tomorrow; the Messiah comes near when we welcome others and cure the sick. They need to remember this, but do they? [We need to remember this, but do **we**?] They forget or misunderstand, just like we do. And yet it is to the two of them, Cleopas and his partner, the two Jesus has "come near to", who still don't understand, yet Jesus still reveals himself to them. This should give us hope. For when we don't remember or don't understand, God may be poised to reveal God's self to us, as well. And I believe, God will come near as many times as needed, until we finally see and understand.

And so back to Chris~ The "fresh expressions" guy. Chris invited me to begin to plan our church's mission after quarantine. We the church, have to adapt, we must adapt to change. We the church, have to find new ways of being the church.

For many of us, the church is no longer a building, as we are learning in our worship this morning. "YOU, the people are the church." We are the only church someone may experience today. We may be the only Bible someone reads today. Our faces, may be the only face of God someone sees today. We all know body language is 55% of communicating with each other. Seeing our face, will others' faces light up? Will our faces offer an unconditional

acceptance of another? Will our faces show the world what an amazing God we love, and will we reflect God's face to everyone we meet? Will our faces bring a beacon of the light of Christ to others? Now, that's a great way to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection, don't we think? And what a great way of celebrating a new way of living! In the name of God, creating presence, redeeming Christ, and life giving an inspiring Spirit. Amen.