

## ***The Long Slog to Communion***

Luke 24:13-35  
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Now, what?

Every single one of us asks that question  
at some point in our lives, several points, probably.

Now what?

Maybe you are asking that question right now.

Maybe those of you with children are *being asked* that question a lot these days.

You see, we ask that question whenever we find ourselves  
taking our first steps down a road that we'd rather not walk,  
a road with an unclear destination.

This is the road we walk after a death, after a divorce,  
a diagnosis, a job loss, a pandemic.

Now what?

There are many reasons why you might find yourself asking that question,  
but whatever they are, this the question you ask when you are on a road that wasn't in your trip plans.  
Maybe it wasn't even on your map.

But there you are.

Where do you go from here? Where are we going from here?

Now what?

Now, what?

I think that's a good question,  
because every honest question is a good question. .

On Easter Sunday, very early in the morning,  
a group of women went to the tomb of Jesus,  
and they encountered angels, who said to them,  
"Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
He's not here. He has risen!"

The women returned from the tomb  
and told the eleven apostles the good news.  
But the apostles didn't believe them.  
In fact, they derisively dismissed the women's reports as "nonsense" --  
as "women's trinkets" as the Greek word literally means.  
Sadly, this wouldn't be the last time that men missed the good news  
because it came from the mouths of women.

Two weeks ago, on Easter Sunday,  
we celebrated Jesus' resurrection.

But maybe, on Easter Sunday, and the days since then,  
you have found yourself thinking less about news of resurrection,

and more about that question that everyone asks  
when they find themselves, for whatever reason,  
taking their first steps down a road with an unclear destination:

Now what?

Now, what?

This is a message for those of you who lie awake nights  
with “Now what?” swirling through your brains.

This is a message for those of you who are distracted, preoccupied during the day,  
running here and there, caught in that cruel in-between state:

not able to work, not able to sleep, not fully awake, not fully at rest.

This is a message for those of you who continue to search for one persuasive reason  
to celebrate Christ’s resurrection while you’re still stuck in Good Friday grief.

This is a message for you who were present, via Zoom, for our Easter service,  
but are still waiting for Christ to rise in your life.

If any of this describes how you feel right now, or have sometimes felt,  
or if you know someone who feels this way,  
well then, this is a message for you.

You see, on Easter Sunday, after hearing the women’s reports,  
two disciples were on the road that they didn’t want to walk.

Luke 24, beginning with verse 14.

*[They] were going to a village called Emmaus,  
about seven miles from Jerusalem,  
and they were talking with each other about everything that had happened.  
As they talked and discussed these things with each other,  
Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;  
but they were kept from recognizing him.*

*He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”*

*They stood still, their faces downcast.*

They stood still, their faces downcast.  
Those two disciples don’t see Jesus.  
After all that Jesus had taught them,  
despite the reports from the women,  
despite the empty tomb,  
all that they felt at that point was their grief and pain.  
and all that they saw was an ignorant stranger.

Picking up again at verse 18:

*One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not  
know the things that have happened there in these days?”*

*“What things?” he asked.*

*“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.  
“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.  
The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death,  
and they crucified him;  
but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*

We had hoped.  
For you grammarians out there,  
that verb is past perfect tense,  
indicating an action that occurred in the past  
before something else happened.

We had hoped that we would spend many years together after retirement.  
We had hoped.  
We had hoped that this job would be more secure.  
We had hoped.  
We had hoped that our sacrifices in coming to this country would provide security for our family.  
We had hoped.  
We had hoped that our love would be enough to repair our relationship.  
We had hoped.  
We had hoped that our daughter, our son, would not make decisions that hurt themselves and others.  
We had hoped.  
We had hoped this treatment would lead to a cure.  
We had hoped.  
We had hoped that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel,  
we had hoped, those disciples said, and they continued talking,;

Verse 21

*And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.  
In addition, some of our women amazed us.  
They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body.  
They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.  
Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said,  
but they did not see Jesus.”*

But they – they -- did not see Jesus.  
It's ironic, isn't it?  
These two disciples' report that those other disciples didn't see Jesus.

Verse 25.

*Jesus said to them, “How foolish you are,  
and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!  
Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”  
And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,  
he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.  
As they approached the village to which they were going,  
Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.  
But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.”*

“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a **stranger** and you invited me in.” (Matthew 25:35-36)

Jesus, the stranger, went in to stay with them.

Verse 30.

*When he was at the table with them,  
he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.*

*Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.  
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?”*

Jesus takes what those two disillusioned disciples offered to him –  
their distorted story, their hospitality, their bread –  
and he breaks them, blesses them and gives them back.  
And it was around that table where the disciples knew the truth of resurrection.

Verse 35.

*So They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.  
There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying,  
“It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”  
Then the two told what had happened on the way,  
and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

You know sometimes, when we grieve, when we are in pain,  
we find ourselves on a road that we’d rather not walk --  
a tough road, a hard road, a seemingly endless road with an uncertain destination.  
But those disciples’ journey to Emmaus teaches us this:  
Sometimes God is present with us and we just don’t see it.  
Sometimes, God walks alongside us, and all we see is a stranger wanting to chat.  
Sometimes, the risen Lord speaks to us, gently searching us,  
and we can’t see beyond our broken dreams, our lost hopes, our ruined plans.

In our most difficult times, we like to ask,  
“God, where are you?” Why aren’t you here?  
Now what?

But we should never mistake our spiritual blindness for God’s invisibility,  
for the road that begins with “Now what?”  
can be the same road to communion,  
the road that Jesus walks the entire way,

It can feel like a long slog to communion,  
but, if we keep on it,  
if we put one foot in front of the other,  
with the scriptures before us,  
our sisters and brothers beside us,  
and the Spirit leading us,

it can also be a road to joy.

For you who continue to struggle this morning, this is a message for you.  
Those two disciples' spiritual blindness did not prevent Jesus from coming for them.  
Those disciples' ignorance of the scriptures did not prevent Jesus from coming to them.  
Jesus does not limit his presence to those who have everything all worked out.  
Jesus is even with those who do not recognize who is walking right beside them.

The road to Emmaus tells us that out of the dark, comes light,  
out of despair, comes hope,  
out of the tomb, comes the risen Christ.  
In the broken bread shared by sisters and brothers in Christ, comes revelation.

Now what?  
Now, what?  
We ask that question whenever we find ourselves  
having to take our first steps down a road  
that we'd rather not walk,  
a road with an unclear destination.

But the amazing thing is,  
this is the road the Jesus walks with us.  
Jesus transforms our long, slog to nowhere,  
into the way of joy,  
the way of communion,  
the way of life lived as one, at one.  
At one with God.  
At one with my sister, my brother.  
At one with my enemy.  
At one with God's creation.

Now what?  
Now, what?

Well, we walk.