

13Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14**They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15**As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16**but they were kept from recognizing him.

17He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. **18**One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19"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. **20**The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21**but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22**In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning **23**but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24**Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

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

28As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. **29**But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31**Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. **32**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?"

33They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34**and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." **35**Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Biblical scholars figure that the road stretching from Jerusalem to Emmaus was about seven miles long. And yet, the Road to Emmaus must have seemed a lot longer than seven miles for Cleopas and his friend that first Easter afternoon. The journey to Emmaus must have felt more like seventy miles than seven because the road seems so much longer when our hearts are so heavy with sorrow that we can actually feel the weight of them pressing against the walls of our chests. The journey to Emmaus must have felt more like seventy miles than seven because the road seems so much longer when we're anxious, not knowing who or what will be there to meet us when we arrive at our destination. The journey to Emmaus must have felt more like seventy miles than seven because the road seems so much longer when our faces are down turned, streaked with tears of grief. The road TO Emmaus can seem long—so, so long.

Surely the Road to Emmaus felt long that first Easter afternoon as Cleopas and his friend walked it. They had so much to say to one another—so many questions to ask and try to answer. The

last week had left them exhausted—absolutely spent. It was hard to believe that it had been just a week since they'd walked the road to Jerusalem with Jesus—since the crowds had greeted him at the city gates waving palm branches and shouting “hosanna, hosanna in the highest!” And it was even harder to believe that those same crowds, just days later, shouted “Crucify him. Crucify him.” Cleopas and his friend were shocked by the turn in the crowd but they were angered by their own religious leaders—folks in whom they had put their trust—and yet who listened to those crowds and instead of pardoning Jesus “handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified.” And as if that wasn't bad enough—now the body was missing. They'd heard the news from the women—that the stone had been rolled away. And some of the disciples went to see—indeed the tomb was empty—but the body of their friend was no where to be found.

And so Cleopas and his friend left town. The scriptures don't tell us why they went to Emmaus but I imagine they just needed to get away—to get out of the dusty, crowded streets of Jerusalem where people were still mocking the one who was called King of the Jews who—in the end—couldn't even save himself. I imagine that they had second-guessed their decision to leave after the women found the tomb empty that morning—what if all that Jesus had said about the resurrection really was true? But Jesus wasn't around, there was no body and no resurrected Messiah and Cleopas and his friend just wanted out.

And if that is the reason they left Jerusalem, to just get away from it all, well isn't that ironic because in leaving the city, they stepped right into the path of the Risen Savior who approached them on the road asking “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” His question stopped them dead in their tracks on the Road to Emmaus—who was this guy? Who didn't know about what had happened in Jerusalem? Where had he been—hiding behind a rock or something? And so they told him about Jesus of Nazareth who was a prophet, powerful in word and deed . . . And they said to him “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. 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 him they did not see.” And as Cleopas said all of this it must have felt as if the scab that was starting to form over the gaping wound of grief and pain left by events of the past week was torn off as he relived the story for the stranger on the road.

And how stunned Cleopas and his friend must have been when the stranger replied in a rather curt manner—“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And the stranger went on to explain everything the scriptures had to say about Jesus—the Messiah. When they came upon the city limits sign for Emmaus, the stranger acted as if he were going to

move on to the next town but Cleopas and his friend, noting the late hour and being strangely fascinated by this intriguing stranger, invited him to stay with them.

They went to the house where they were staying and after washing their feet, they sat down for dinner and as they did so, Cleopas and his friend experienced the most intense case of *de ja vu* they'd ever known. Suddenly this stranger wasn't so strange anymore—he looked like, well maybe not looked like but had the same mannerisms and ways about him as did Jesus and wait—what's he doing with the bread—he's holding it up and blessing it and breaking it and . . . OH MY GOD—it's Jesus, it's him, it's him—look, look it's him, it's really him! And just as soon as they realized it was him—he was gone and Cleopas and his friend turned to one another saying “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” And though it was a glorious moment of recognition in which they felt alive, they felt the love, they felt the love that's really real, and didn't it feel good, they didn't stick around to savor it. Instead, they got up and walked the road FROM Emmaus, back to Jerusalem. They had been in the presence of the Risen Christ, had absorbed his spirit into themselves, and all they wanted to do was run those seven miles back to Jerusalem to share the news of what they had seen and heard and felt.

But those seven miles of road, the road FROM Emmaus, changed more in the hour they were actually in Emmaus than it has in the two thousand years since. The Road FROM Emmaus is a sight to behold, really. It's so messy. The ditches, the ditches are littered with baggage. Bags full of guilt, remorse, and shame folks had been carrying for years, after encountering the resurrected Christ—the bags are just left by the side of the road FROM Emmaus. And along with the baggage, canes and walkers and wheelchairs thrown into the bushes. Everybody walking the road FROM Emmaus travels on their own two feet—healed and whole, restored and renewed. And as you're walking, you hear crunching beneath your feet—and when you take a look you realize the road FROM Emmaus is peppered with hearing aids and glasses lenses—because on the road FROM Emmaus the deaf can hear and the blind can see and the lame can walk. And just as our skin absorbs the warmth of the sunshine on these long awaited spring days, warmth that soaks through our hair and our skin and our clothes to penetrate bodies that have—for so many months—been stiff and sore with cold—so too do we absorb the Spirit as we walk the Road FROM Emmaus. A road that is there for us to walk because the resurrection matters—because life has conquered death and love has triumphed over all and the Risen Christ is in our midst. The Road FROM Emmaus—we're walking it even now and saying, I feel alive, I feel a love, I feel a love that's really real—the love of the Risen Christ.

Hit it, Bill. (Excerpt of the eighties classic “Walking on Sunshine.”)

We're walking on sunshine on the Road FROM Emmaus—a road of love and life and light to last forever. Now don't it feel good!

