

**Made Real**  
**Rev. Matt Landry**  
**May 7, 2017**

**Scripture:** Luke 24: 13-35, Road to Emmaus

*"Gather gladness from the skies; Take a lesson from the ground; Flowers do open their heavenward eyes And a Spring-time joy have found; Earth throws Winter's robes away, Decks herself for Easter Day. Seek God's house in happy throng; Crowded let His table be; Mingle praises, prayer, and song, Singing to the Trinity. Henceforth let your souls always Make each morn an Easter Day."* These are the words of famous English poet and Jesuit priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who wrote many poems on the theme of Easter. This is one of my favorites written in 1866, simply titled "Easter."

This morning is still Easter. Hopkins wrote "Make each morn an Easter day," but he also had this phrase about a table, "Crowded let His table be." There's something about breaking bread together, something uniting, sacred, and holy. It's been a place where I have deeply connected with God, where I have communed with the living Christ, which is probably why I preach nearly every Holy Communion Sunday, which I am totally fine with. In this meal, Christ becomes tangible, taste-able, and real in our community of faith. Our eyes are opened to what's really real in our world.

It's hard to believe, it's not always an easy road. For many of us, we celebrate Easter Sunday, we proclaim the resurrection, but what does that really mean for our lives today, four weeks later, I wonder; is the risen Christ really real in our lives? Is Jesus still risen in us? Now, if you think it's easy, look at the disciples who didn't believe or at least didn't recognize Jesus on the first Easter day. For the disciples, for us, we need to experience to believe. It needs to be made real.

Cleopas and an unnamed disciple were walking out of Jerusalem toward the town of Emmaus on the day of the resurrection, on Easter day. We don't know anything about these two, not even Cleopas is named anywhere else in the New Testament, and he could have been with a fellow male disciple or some scholars have written that it could have been his wife. They have been through Holy Week.

They may have heard about the Last Supper Jesus had with his closest disciples, the twelve, but they were a part of the larger group that followed Jesus, maybe the 70 or so who believed. They knew about the crucifixion, the death, and the burial of Jesus.

They also knew of this "idle tale" about the women who went to the tomb early that morning, but didn't find his body.

It was too unbelievable. It was all too much. Every painful step on the seven mile journey toward Emmaus had to be full of more and more disappointment moving toward despair. "We had hoped he was the one," they said. There were no lilies, no excitement or joy on this first Easter

day for these disciples. They're walking the road of doubt and sadness, as they tried to make sense of what had just took place that weekend in Jerusalem.

The two keep walking, trying to get away from the confusion, sadness, weariness of spirit they felt in this city where it all happened. They were "examining the evidence together." That's when a stranger joined their conversation. They weren't really sure who he was and they don't even catch on to his identity when he interpreted the Scriptures of "Moses and all the prophets." The story, they knew by heart. The stranger gets them to tell the story: "Jesus of Nazareth 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."

The truth for all of us is that we've been on that Emmaus road. When we can't seem to hold on to hope or find faith even after Easter. We have too many questions, doubts, and it all seems like too much to believe. I've been on that road before. It might be the road of disappointment when faith doesn't work the way we wanted, or the road of judgment, or the road of questions and doubts. You've been there, too, haven't you, though the time and location may not have been that ancient Roman road on the West Bank leading out of town? The good news is that this is exactly the place where Jesus meets us. This is where Jesus shows up and becomes real.

The disciples were leaving Jerusalem to go back to what they knew. They were likely going home, going back to their old jobs, their old way of life. This Jesus movement became way too difficult, way too much for them. The cross, the death, it was all too much.

The promise of Holy Week, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday is not that God will answer every question, fill every need, or take us off the road of despair and difficulties, instead God will walk with us on the road. God will become real in those times. We just have to keep the hope, have patience, and allow the space and openness for Jesus to show up. That's what those two disciples walking on the Emmaus road did, they welcomed this stranger in their midst.

When they arrive to the village where they were going, we're not told its Emmaus, Cleopas and the other disciple offer hospitality to their stranger companion on the road, as it was late in the day. In a reversal of hospitality, the stranger who is at the table with the disciples, "took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them." This is an exact quote from earlier in the Gospel of Luke at the Last Supper. Jesus gives them the bread and their eyes were opened. It just got real!

The good news we hear today, on this fourth Sunday of Easter, is that God becomes real on the road. When we least expect it, Jesus becomes real. I have heard it said from many preachers before that "God loves us right where we are on the road, but God also loves us too much to leave us where we are." We have a God who offers Godself in Jesus, making true what's already real in the heart of God, that we are all beloved children, with our doubts and struggles in faith, we're all walking the road the road together. As a community of faith, we have to walk with each other, and encourage one another to walk the way back to Jerusalem, back to faith and community. This story really could have been called "The Road Back to Jerusalem." After they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, when he became really real to them, they

literally turned, repented, and moved toward Jerusalem. They walked in despair and sadness away from Jerusalem, and they returned "at once" to Jerusalem to find the eleven disciples saying "It is true! The Lord has risen!"

Last Saturday, I had the privilege of being one of a few ecumenical clergy who processed for the Ordination and Consecration of the new Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis. Jeffrey Lee, Bishop of Chicago, preached a powerful message, where he said, "The sacraments don't make true, they make real. What could we possibly need more than a church which can deal with its own divisions, its own cherished theological arguments, its racism, its classism, its homophobia, its mistrustfulness; a church that can tell the truth about all those things and practice laying them all aside and begin making true what's already real in the heart of God? We need a church that is a sacrament of God's love."

We need to be a sacrament of God's love together, on the road, in this community. Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and their eyes were opened to what was real before them. The reality of God's heart is found in the stranger of Jesus who walked the road with the disciples. Jesus becomes real to those on the road; doubtful, disappointed, hopeless; maybe Jesus will become real to us this morning in the breaking of the bread and in this community of faith. When we draw closer to each other and closer to God, then we come closer to what's already real.

Isn't that what we do when we receive Eucharist or Holy Communion? We draw closer to each other and closer to the heart of God. The realness of the risen Lord is found in breaking bread together. It reminds us that wherever we are on the road, if we're moving toward Emmaus or back toward Jerusalem, we are crossing the paths of others on the road, one way or another, and it's only when we stop, sit at the table, see each other, and break bread are our eyes opened to what's really real.

Sara Miles, a journalist and writer, tells her conversion story in the book *Take This Bread*. "Early one morning, I walked into St Gregory of Nyssa Church. I had no earthly reason to be there. I'd never heard a Gospel reading, never said the Lord's Prayer. I was certainly not interested in becoming a Christian -- or, as I thought of it rather less politely, a religious nut. But on other long walks I'd passed the beautiful wooden building, and this time I went in, on an impulse, with no more than a reporter's habitual curiosity. I walked in, took a chair and tried not to catch anyone's eye. The people sang. I sang too. It crossed my mind that this was ridiculous.

*We sang and sat down, waited and listened. "Jesus invites everyone to his table," the woman announced, and we started moving up to the table. It had some dishes on it, and a pottery goblet.*

*And then we gathered around that table. And there was more singing and standing, and someone was putting a piece of fresh, crumbly bread in my hands, saying, "the body of Christ," and handing me the goblet of sweet wine saying "the blood of Christ," and then something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me. I still can't explain my first communion. It made no sense. What I knew was happening -- God, named "Christ" or "Jesus," was real."*

With all of our doubts and struggles in faith, with all of our searching and wrestling with Scripture, just as those two disciples were doing that day on the Emmaus road; Jesus becomes real in the breaking of the bread in this community of faith. Jesus becomes alive, risen, and real in all of our lives. Our eyes are opened to the reality that we are the body of Christ, and we walk with each other.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, in another poem about Easter, wrote the prayer, "Easter in us." Let Easter get into us, come where we live, permeate our souls, and enter our bodies. Easter in us. This is where it gets real; in community, around a table, sharing the bread. *"Crowded let His table be; Mingle praises, prayer, and song, Singing to the Trinity. Henceforth let your souls always make each morn an Easter Day."*

Let's pray:

*Be present, be present, O Jesus, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of the bread. Amen.*