

*13Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

I think I have a solution for the high price of gasoline. I am going to dig for oil in my back yard. I have some bare spots back there where the grass does not grow very well. Doing a little digging will not harm my yard much though when I strike oil and have to put one of those big pumps in my yard that may bother the neighbors some. But I know that oil comes out of the ground and I have some ground in my back yard so it is time for digging.

What's that? You don't think I will strike oil? It takes a drilling rig? And studies by geologists to predict where the oil is most likely to be found? I need to look in the right place if I want to find oil? I guess I had better buy some grass seed for that bare spot and forget about finding oil.

They were looking for Jesus that day, the way those who are in grief search. They were looking for Jesus though they might not have described their search in that way. Someone we love dies and we go back. Sometimes

we go back to moments and decisions that could have been different and we wonder – would she still be alive if... These two men who were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus were talking about what had happened to Jesus, searching.

A stranger joined them. Luke tells us that it was Jesus but they did not recognize him that day. In a way that is a surprise. In the searching that is grief sometimes the back of a head will catch our eye and our mind will say, “That’s him!” but then he turns and we see it is not. But on that day though Jesus came to walk with them they did not know it.

“What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?” this stranger asked.

They told him how they had hoped Jesus of Nazareth was the one to free Israel. They told him how those hopes were dashed when Jesus was arrested and crucified. And though they did not say it their questions were really about God. Just the way our questions are.

A grandmother dies, a husband, a child and our souls cry out, “How could God let it happen?” We know about death in a general way but every death of one we love and our own death as well is a challenge to faith in God. A baby is born and we look and say, “This life is a miracle – a gift of God.” Death comes and we cry out, “Where is God?”

The stranger who walked with them that day was answering that question for these two. He interpreted the scriptures to them so they could see that what happened to Jesus was part of God’s plan. Still they did not recognize that this stranger was Jesus for whom they searched.

The two men came to their destination – the stranger was going on but they urged him to share their bread, their shelter.

At table Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened – they recognized Jesus and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

That same hour they retraced their steps, rushing to tell the eleven that Jesus was alive.

One of these two who walked along with Jesus was named Cleopas.

The other is you.

This encounter with Jesus that Luke has recorded is not so much a piece of history as it is an invitation. You are the one invited to listen as the scriptures are opened, and everything pointing to Jesus explained. You are the one invited to the table with not one stranger but many strangers who in the sharing of the bread and cup become the very presence of Jesus for you and you for them. This walk to Emmaus and this stopping to break bread is what happens in this place every time we gather.

Those of us whose hearts burn within us as we hear the story of Jesus and whose eyes are opened as we share the bread and cup rush out from this place to share the good news.

For nearly two thousand years Christians have gathered to open the scriptures and to share the meal and encountered Jesus raised from the dead – Jesus present right in this moment. But not present in a way that we can put him on a leash and take him with us. Possess him, own him, keep him for ourselves. Every week he must be encountered anew as you and I gather opening the scriptures and sharing the meal.

When we think that we will find Jesus on a baseball field or in attending St. Mattress on a Sunday morning it is possible – I could strike oil in my back yard too. But Martin Luther said that we ought to be where Jesus has promised to meet us – not on some mountaintop but among God’s people gathered to open the scriptures and share the meal. Here is where our eyes are opened, our grief comforted, our living Lord Jesus with us.

Amen.