

Luke 24:13-35 The Long Walk to Emmaus
April 19, 2026

Have you ever thought about the places you might like to see if you had the opportunity to visit Israel, the land of Christian origins? According to Google, the most popular sites are The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, The Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem, the Via Dolorosa, with the seven stations of the cross, and also the Western wall of the Temple.

There are other places that are also well traveled; Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, The Mt. of Olives, Gethsemane. I wondered about the Emmaus Road, if there was any interest. Like most of the other pilgrim destinations, precise locations are not known. In this case there are two obstacles, the first is that modern life has covered over the ancient landscape.

The other hindrance comes from the actual text of Luke's gospel. I have spoken before about the variant readings among the manuscripts. In the case of Luke 24:13, there are two possibilities; the version most widely accepted says that Emmaus was about 60 stadia, or 7 miles from Jerusalem.

All of that is somewhere underneath the modern city. There is another variant that says it was 160 stadia, about 19 miles, but the general consensus is that the shorter distance is the correct one. Anyway, the actual road no longer exists.

Today's reading from the psalms is the 116th. In the midst of troubled times, the psalmist speaks;

"I love the Lord, for he heard my voice, he heard my cry for mercy. *Because* he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me, I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord, "Lord, save me. The Lord is gracious and righteous, our God is full of compassion . . . Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you."

Though it does not say specifically what the trouble was; it speaks to the normal situation in which all people everywhere and in every time find themselves. In this beautiful and magnificent world, in *trouble*.

It can be the international situation or something very personal. It can be economic stresses or physical health. It can be strained relationships. It can be one's own pain or the pain of others, those we love, or the world's pain; it can be a confrontation with one's mortality, or the failure to live up to the moral standard, but we all know, and when the bible speaks of it, we listen. Part of Easter's meaning is the in Christ, God has been good to us all.

For the followers of Jesus on the days after that fateful Friday, it was the death of their leader. They had talked themselves into a great hope that had been summarily

dashed. It wasn't Jesus who had led them to their misunderstood beliefs.

He *tried* to tell them, and then their hopes collided with reality, and as is always true in the course of life, when the misguided perceptions and false hopes encounter reality, in hard and painful ways, reality claims the day.

Two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, not known in history for any other than *this* occasion. As they walked along they discussed the events of the last few days, when Jesus himself joined them asking what were they talking about. They did not recognize him. One wonders what they thought of the wounds in his hands and feet. They were astonished that he did not know.

As they told him about what happened, and about the rumors that had been spread among them by the women who had visited the tomb earlier that morning, he changed his tune a bit, and it seemed like maybe he *did* know something. He began to explain to them from the scriptures the meaning of it all.

When they reached the village it was late and they invited him to stay. While they were sharing an evening meal, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to them." At last, their eyes were opened and they knew him; and then in those enigmatic words, "he vanished from their sight."

The, "Road to Emmaus," is one of the featured Easter stories, like the encounter with Thomas or the scene

at the lake with the miraculous catch of fish and Peter's restoration, or Mary in the garden mistaking him for the gardener, or the scene in Galilee when he gave the Great Commission.

It tells us about the human ability *not to see* something obviously present, because it challenges expectations of what is possible. It speaks of the astonishment of sharing a meal which cures that blindness and enables them to see.

We are reminded that all of our troubles are but momentary, and even when they are overwhelming, are destined to fade away like a mist in the presence of the living God. And sooner or later that becomes a part of our reality as well.

The journey to Emmaus is towards spiritual sight. It was the path to the recognition of the Risen Jesus. There is the presence of Jesus as they walked along the way." The Real Presence of the Lord, even when we do not recognize it, is a foundational aspect of the spiritual life.

There is the study of the scriptures. We are told that Jesus opened up the *scriptures* to them, everything that was about him. Bible reading and study is one of the central disciplines of the church.

To be sure, it can be a free-for-all, but it should be engaged, not feared. With the guidance of the church's theological and doctrinal claims, and in the context of the family of God, the community of faith,

the scriptures open up for us an understanding and a vision of life that liberates us from unhealthy habits and from bad thinking that are destructive of faith and discouraging and frustrating to experience. It gives us friends for the journey, and cures the blindness that prevents our apprehending of God.

And finally, there is the breaking of bread. *That is when they saw him.* Something about being lost in the basic necessities of life, like in the sharing of a meal, forces us to set aside all the ways we disguise ourselves, set up defensive mechanisms and close ourselves off. It was when the bread was broken, as it had been only a few days earlier, that the scales fell off their eyes and sight came clear.

Of course, there is more to Christian spirituality than divine presence and the study of sacred literature, and table fellowship. In addition, there is gathering for worship; the giving of alms, which is the old way of saying the support of charitable ministries through material and financial offerings and the volunteering of energy and time. There is also prayer, which is another way of saying, paying attention.

It is in the long walk to Emmaus that God becomes known to us, and do not our hearts burn within us when we hear . . . Like it or not, when we neglect these disciplines and spiritual practices, our attention is distracted and its span is narrowed; the meaning of resurrected life is blurred.

It turns out that the Road to Emmaus was a real road, and the village was a real village. From one of the possible sites that is 7 miles from Jerusalem, on the conclusion that the farther journey is accurate, there is a new 12 mile hike across the Judean countryside.

There are two old monasteries there that claim to be built on the site of the home of Cleopas, and there is a church called, “the Breaking of the Bread.” One day, if I ever have the chance to visit the biblical lands, one of my hopes would be to hike that Emmaus Road, even though I know that the precise location is not confidently known, this is not on anyone’s top ten list of things to do in Jerusalem.

I would not expect anything special to happen, no magical presence. I would simply enjoy the walk and think about the importance of the Emmaus story in Luke’s gospel, when Jesus accompanied Cleopas and another unnamed disciple, though they did not recognize him, and he showed them the meaning of the gospel, and helped them to be able to see that the “risen Lord is gracious and righteous and full of compassion,” and to hear the blessing of the psalm,

“return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you.”