



**Communion Meditation**  
**Preached by Anne Ledbetter**  
**May 1, 2011**  
**Scripture – Luke 24: 13-35**

There is something ephemeral, or fleeting about the resurrection stories in scripture. In a way they sound like ghost stories. Jesus appears out of nowhere – in the garden with Mary, in a locked room where the disciples are hiding, on a beach along the Sea of Tiberias where he grills fish tacos for his friends, or with two disciples on their way out of town heading home to Emmaus. In each story Jesus is not readily recognized by his dearest friends and most faithful followers. In several he disappears quite suddenly. Now they see him, now they don't.

Today's story may be many people's favorite resurrection story, perhaps because it is so accessible to us. Luke begins the passage by saying "two of them" meaning two of the disciples were leaving Jerusalem, headed to Emmaus, a village 7 miles away, and talking to each other about what had happened in recent days. Luke identifies one as Cleopas (not a name we recognize from one of the twelve.) The other one remains anonymous giving speculation that it may have been a woman since women are often not mentioned by name in scripture. Or maybe Luke did not know the person's name, or perhaps.... Perhaps he intentionally left out the name, to prompt us readers and listeners to insert our own, to step into the story, and see ourselves on this journey.

As the two are walking and talking, Luke tells us that Jesus joins them, but they do not recognize their master and teacher. Ironically Jesus ends up teaching them the scriptures about himself. And we are thinking "why don't they see him? What's wrong with them? Are they blind?!"

Have you ever known someone who could not see their own hand if they held it up in front of their face? I remember Alice Beck an older adult in a former congregation who suddenly and inexplicably suffered a period of clinical depression. Members sent cards, took her meals, prayed with her, brought her flowers, did errands for her, cleaned her house. Then one day I visited, and she looked at me and said, "Anne, I cannot pray. God has forgotten me. I feel so alone." I hugged her and prayed with her, but part of me wanted to shake her and say, "Alice, just look around you! God is here with you, enfolding you daily in love and care!" Naturally, Alice could see God's hand months later, but not when she was mired in despondency.

Isn't it that way with the Lord sometimes? That we recognize God's presence days, weeks, months, or even years later. It's almost that way for these disciples. We think they will never see him, until... Until dinner time when he accepts their invitation to remain with them, and then at the table, he, the guest, becomes the host, taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it and giving it to them. And the scales fall from their eyes and they recognize him!

They see their Lord –and remember how their body sensed his presence, even when their minds did not. For as he had been teaching them on the road, didn't they have a physical response to his company, a burning in their hearts? Then, just as quickly, Jesus is gone! Vanished. They run back to Jerusalem (7 miles remember – just over a fourth of a marathon!) and tell the others what had been made known to them.

What had been made known to them. Not what they themselves discerned – but what had been made known, or shown, or revealed to them! It raises the question for us this morning: When and where has Christ been made known to us?

I recall in college witnessing one of my professors get berated and insulted by a secretary in another department for nothing that was his fault. I was aghast that anyone would treat a professor that way, but he simply listened with kindness and care. My professor was more than polite and cordial – he endured an attack he did not deserve and showed only gentleness and sympathy for the woman. I still remember feeling that in him I caught a glimpse of Christ.

Methodist preacher Mark Trotter points out that there are events in the Bible that are never going to happen to us. The Easter narrative is one of them. Mary Magdalene and the other women going to the tomb, finding it empty – that's not going to happen to us. The empty tomb was seen only by a few people. But there are many who experienced the resurrected Christ, and there still are.<sup>1</sup> The Road to Emmaus strikes a note of familiarity with us. We have had our hearts broken by grief. We have wondered, "what next?" after a bitter disappointment. We had felt lost and disillusioned by the weight of the world. And we have met Christ in the guise of a stranger.

When have you experienced this holy heartburn? When has Christ been made known to you? Our scripture provides clues as to likely times we may meet our Lord:

- In the opening of the scriptures
- In the welcoming of a stranger on the road
- At the table – whether it is the Lord's table or our family dining table or a picnic table at a roadside park, or a booth in a greasy spoon diner.

Ordinary times – and so ordinary that perhaps we may miss him if our heads are not raised in the fleeting moment of his passing.

The early church recognized the Eucharist in this story – and understood that we too have Christ made known to us – in many ways – but perhaps most regularly and ritually at the table in communion.

If you doubt the power of the Eucharist, just hear Sara Miles' testimony. Former news correspondent, raised agnostic if not atheist writes, "I came late to Christianity, knocked upside down by a midlife conversion centered around a literal chunk of bread. The immediacy of my conversion experience left me perhaps freakily convinced of the presence of Jesus around me.<sup>ii</sup> I tasted Jesus before I read about him and turned back to Scripture for clues about what I'd already experienced in my own body.<sup>iii</sup> Eating Jesus cracked my world open and made me hunger to keep sharing food with other people. That desire led to me to an altar, at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, where I helped break the bread for Holy Communion, then to a food pantry that I set up around the same altar, where we gave away free groceries to anyone who showed up.<sup>iv</sup> "I know this sounds nuts," I said to an old friend, who'd been shocked by my conversion to a faith I'd mocked, and baffled by my sudden urge to give away (tons of) lettuce and cereal. "But, when we're all together at the Eucharist and at the food pantry, it's the same thing. Because Jesus is real."<sup>v</sup>

In addition to Christ's gracious and open invitation, perhaps we should print and proclaim a caution to all those who would come to the table,

**“WARNING:** Jesus is alive and real, not tucked safely away in heaven. This is the table of our Risen Lord. He's here- eager to feed and forgive you. He is also likely to change you, and lead you out into the world, to people and places that need his healing touch, his caring presence, his palpable love, and abounding hope. Some have been known to experience heartburn from this meal. Eat at your own risk!”

Did I say these resurrection scenes were ghost stories? I suppose they are indeed – experiences inspired by the Holy Ghost – that Spirit in which we live and move and have our being.

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<sup>i</sup> Mark Trotter sermon “Take a Stranger to Lunch” p. 129. *Pulpit Digest*, April – June 2000

<sup>ii</sup> Sara Miles, *Jesus Freak*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010) p. xi

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii