

My spouse, Dean, had a really good English teacher in high school who instilled in him never to use passive voice. I didn't receive the same lesson or I perhaps was daydreaming in class the day it was covered because there are times when Dean will let me know when I'm using passive voice. In today's text; however, there is an example of passive voice. Right at the beginning. "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (v. 16). Who is keeping Cleopas and the other disciple from recognizing Jesus? We don't know because we aren't told. Luke does not reveal the source of their blindness. But let's back up for a moment and take a larger look. Did you know that there are only seven post-resurrection stories in the gospels? Seven- the biblical number for wholeness. Even those who saw Jesus in the flesh had a hard time convincing others it was true. "Thomas did not buy it, not until he had seen for himself. Seven resurrection stories do not go very far. Jesus did not appear to everyone before he ascended into heaven, which left plenty of people to weigh evidence for themselves, to listen to the testimony of those who were there and decide if and what they would believe (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Gospel Medicine*). Luke is the only gospel writer who tells us this post-resurrection road story on the afternoon of Easter Sunday. Side note: "Easter does not always come in three days. Stones are rolled away, but sometimes we stay in the tomb" (Shannon Michael Peter, *FOW*). Let us be attentive as we begin in prayer and then listen for God's Word for us this day. **READ. PRAY.**

Figuratively speaking, every one of us, regardless of identity or circumstance, knows the Emmaus road. It is the road between distress

and belief. Between disillusionment and acceptance. Between dashed hopes and promises fulfilled (Caroline Lewis, *WP*). Not only have we walked it; we've lost our way on it. It is the road you walk when your team has lost, when your candidate has been defeated, when you can't find affordable housing, when you've been diagnosed with an illness or when your loved one has died; it's the long road back to the empty house or shelter or to recovery when all you want to do is to use again in order to escape the pain; it's the piles of unopened mail or the discovery that all you have to your name is gone because you thought you left your bags well enough hidden but they were stolen; it's the road to life as usual, if life can ever be usual again. The road is the road to Emmaus and that is where we find Cleopas and his travel companion, who many scholars believe to be Cleopas' spouse, which makes good sense seeing as women play a larger role in Luke and Acts, though we don't know for sure. It is seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Again, the number seven. That is how many miles these two disciples have to talk over the roller coaster events of the past week. What a long road trip! Not the mileage. It is the distance between "we had hoped" and "the Lord is risen indeed" that seems like forever. Are we there yet? These disciples are absolutely flattened; the hope wind is out of their sails. The Lord they staked their lives on, the Messiah they thought would change the world, had died the most humiliating death imaginable, and his promises of a new kingdom seem as dead as Jesus. And to make matters worse, there is now an empty grave and Jesus' body is missing. They had hoped for so much more than this. This is the scene when Jesus mysteriously joins them on their journey- though they don't know it's

Jesus because they don't recognize him. Jesus- as far as they know- is dead. Yes, there is a rumored resurrection, but they aren't looking for him among the living. Who would do that? Even with Jesus by their side...they are oblivious to anything but their disbelief, grief, and the crazy political world in which they live.

I want to note that this is a risky conversation between the disciple, Cleopas, and the other disciple and the risen Lord. "Without knowing who Jesus is, they reveal to the unrecognized Jesus that they considered Jesus a prophet. They confess that they had hoped he would 'redeem Israel,' a desire for change of leadership that the Romans would certainly have found treasonous. The Romans still remained in charge and the poor still needed good news. Political conversations are risky even in contemporary times, but in the ancient world, such conversations could get you crucified. Yes, the conversation Luke provides would have been risky, even foolhardy, for those fleeing town after the execution of their leader" (Margaret Aymer, *FOW*). Hearing and reading the news, even in this Easter season of hope and resurrection and good news, can exhaust us and leave us feeling depleted, doubtful, and hopeless. One of you gave me a copy of an Op Ed piece in *The New York Times* from Easter Sunday, written by David French. In it, French writes these words, "I've been writing for years about the rise in American polarization and the rise in mental health problems. We live in a nation of unprecedented prosperity, but we are not thriving. Instead, we struggle to feel like equal members of a society that is orienting itself to cater to the desires of a very wealthy minority."

French continues, “Another way of putting it is that we have become a nation of smoldering wicks. We struggle to feel hope. We struggle to feel purpose. We look at the world around us and ask: ‘Is this all there is? Is this really what it looks like to live in the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world?’” inb

We had hoped for more- much more. Notice that when Jesus engages them with the question, “What are you two discussing as you walk, Cleopas and the other disciple stood still. They stopped in their tracks- “suggesting that when God enters a conversation we think we are having with one another- when our horizontal perspective on the human condition is assumed from above and crossed by the vertical perspective of God’s word- we cannot but find our lost selves standing still. We have surely come to a crossroad. At issue are not the miles before us but the moment at hand and the eternity that has just invaded time” (Cynthia A. Jarvis, *FOW*). When and where has the risen Christ asked you to reflect on the meaning of the things that have taken place? When has God’s Word interrupted our idle conversation and prompted us to confess that we have lost our way? What was it about the One who listened that turned the details of despair into a pleading for help- for mercy (Jarvis)?

And herein lies the irony. These two disciples are incredulous. Who doesn’t know what has taken place? Haven’t you heard the news or seen what’s trending on social media? They voice their dashed hopes. Jesus doesn’t get defensive or tell them to suck it up. He simply repeats their response with a question: “What things?” And then Jesus listens to them.

He allows them to get it all out. And when they are finished, Jesus challenges their slowness of heart to believe what the prophets had declared- that the Messiah must suffer and enter into his glory. Notice that it doesn't seem like Cleopas and the other are phased by this challenge or at least we aren't told. They still don't recognize Jesus. "Without being asked, this pseudo stranger- Jesus- goes on to tell them a story, tracing God's saving purposes over the events of the last days. Luke gives us no indication that their hearts were burning, only that the hour was late. Drawing near to their destination, Jesus leaves them free to continue on without him. His love is such that we are always free to turn our backs on him, close the doors of our hearts against him, bolt our minds shut in fear of what inviting him might involve" (Jarvis). Notice what these forlorn disciples nonetheless do. Even in their sadness and grief, they offer hospitality to this stranger who warms their hearts in the way only one other person had. I do wonder if they're having an internal dialogue that involves some hint of déjà vu?! Perhaps this hint of familiarity and hope is why they strongly urge their new friend to "Stay with us" (v.29b). Notice the attention to the sojourner. "But then Jesus, their old friend, flips the script as he so often does. He becomes the host. He takes the bread, he blesses it, he breaks it, he shares it with his friends. And then, only then, their eyes were opened. They didn't recognize Jesus until Jesus did the most Jesus thing he does in the Gospel of Luke: he took bread, blessed it and shared it with his friends" (Eric Barrato, [blog](#)).

Recently I was reminded of an excerpt from Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. She writes, *During the day it is hard to remember that all the stars in the sky are out there all the time, even when I am too blinded by the sun to see them.* And Taylor's words led me to think of Wendell Berry's poem, *The Peace of Wild Things*. Berry writes, *When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world and am free.*

And Berry's words lead me back to today's text. We had hoped. We listen to God's Word and we break bread together; our eyes are opened, and we recognize Jesus' presence among us. You can feel today's story shift from despair to hope- the seesaw of the road of life and faith.

"Maybe the rumors are true? Maybe there is a reason to resurrect our crucified hope" (BBT)? Wow, what a shift! The promise of this text is that Jesus will meet his beloved "in the breaking of the bread." "Broken bread nurses our broken faith and can nourish the courage we need to leave our graveclothes behind and vacate the vault of our defeated dreams" (Pater). Here the hospitality of these two disciples "becomes the doorway to grace: actions more than words, welcome more than self-protection provides the space where others might fearlessly enter and find themselves at home. Sharing the common meal transgresses boundaries and allows communion with Christ, who meets us whenever we gather at the Lord's Table- or at the tables that provide self-giving welcome" (Molly T. Marshall, *FOW*).

This past week in *Christianity Today*, the editor-in-chief and prominent evangelical pastor, author, and former leader in the Southern Baptist Convention, Russell Moore, wrote, “For years, some evangelicals have told us that Donald Trump might be the disruptor we need to bring us back to Jesus. For the first time, I think they might be right—just not in the way they thought. Maybe ‘Trump AI Jesus’ is what we’ve been waiting for to show us what we’ve become. And oddly, that just might be a point of hope. The humiliation it caused was not about Trump. Who did not already know his high view of himself? It was about us. The problem is not that Trump can’t tell the difference between himself and Jesus. It’s that too many of us can’t ([link](#)). This is and isn’t about politics. When was the last time your eyes were opened and you recognized Jesus? To what new understandings is God calling the church today? I know I need these questions along with this good news. How about you? Notice that Jesus vanishes from their sight after the meal, and the disciples realized their hearts were burning when Jesus revealed the scriptures to them (v. 32). They went out and told the others who they had met on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread! “We gather as Christians to rehearse- at least once a week- a story the world cannot tell if we keep silent. We live to make sure history focuses on the whole story...God’s story...and no one would care if the Resurrection didn’t undercut the Roman news feed with the headline: This Jesus whom you crucified and blasphemed, ‘God has made him both Lord and Messiah, [and whether we recognize him or not, he is alive and on the loose]’” (Lewis). Alleluia and amen!