

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
April 19, 2026 – 3 Easter
The Road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-35
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

The risen Lord Jesus does not leave his friends alone. On Easter Sunday we heard the account from Matthew's Gospel (28:1-10) of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" early on Easter morning. The women had gone to Jesus' tomb to grieve near his body. Suddenly there was a great earthquake and an angel whose appearance was like lightning told them the astonishing news that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The angel commissioned them to tell Jesus' other disciples this good news. As they ran on their errand, Jesus met them on the way. He greeted them and allowed them to touch him. He told them not to be afraid.

The risen Lord Jesus does not leave his friends alone. In the evening of that first Easter Jesus appeared to the disciples who were gathered behind locked doors for fear of what might happen to them because they were followers of the one who was crucified. Jesus stood among them, showed them the wounds of the crucifixion in his resurrected body, and spoke to them. They knew that Jesus was alive. Thomas was not there, and he doubted what his friends told him. So, Jesus came again, a week later, and gave Thomas the proof he needed so that he would know and believe that his Lord was alive.

The risen Lord Jesus does not leave his friends alone. This morning's Gospel is the famous story of the road to Emmaus. It is Easter day and two of Jesus' disciples – one unnamed follower and Cleopas, who is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible – are walking away from Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified. They were speaking to each other about what had happened to Jesus. Anyone who has grieved for someone they love knows that at first nothing in the world has any importance but the loved one and the loss. These two disciples were so absorbed in their grief that they did not recognize Jesus when he walked with them and spoke to them.

So, Jesus made his identity clearer as he taught them about the Messiah and provided from their scripture an explanation of what had happened to him. Still their eyes were not opened. But there was something about this man that made them want to remain with him. They begged him to stay with them and share a meal. "So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."

For these two men their encounter with the risen Christ was more than a comforting assurance of his continued life. This moment of recognition enabled them to see how Jesus had already been known to them as he explained the scripture: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" And this encounter sent them immediately back to Jerusalem, a dangerous place for the followers of Jesus, because they were compelled

to share their experience of the risen Lord with the eleven apostles and their companions, other friends of Jesus.

Because the women and men who saw the risen Christ shared that Good News with others, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are gathered together here in Jesus' name. We believe that Jesus is among us when we gather in his name. In the words of Eucharistic Prayer C, "Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the bread" – a direct reference to this morning's Gospel. We, who are friends of Jesus, pray that Christ will be known to us in the Eucharist, that Christ will be truly present to us.

The Holy Eucharist is a sacrament. A sacrament always has two parts – a visible and earthly part and an invisible and heavenly part. In a sacrament we believe that God uses what is visible and earthly – in this case, the bread and wine – as a means of imparting grace to us. All that we do is based on our understanding that God is freely offering God's grace to us through the sacrament and on Jesus' promise that he would be present whenever two or three were gathered in his name. God is the actor, the giver of grace. We believe that in the Eucharist God is conveying to us what Jesus was conveying to his followers at the Last Supper: God's love.

We believe that God continually offers us God's love and the opportunity to be in communion with God. But God gives us the freedom to choose how we respond. This is true when we receive the sacrament. God does not "force" grace upon us when we eat the bread and drink the wine. God's grace will enter us only if we receive the sacrament with some degree of faith and love. The reading of scripture, singing hymns, the prayers – what we do together before we share the bread and wine – all of this rehearsal of God's action in history and of the saving acts of Jesus serve to put us in the proper frame of mind and heart and will to prayerfully and lovingly receive the grace God offers us.

The Anglican tradition values the use of reason and the theological wisdom accumulated through the centuries of the life of the Church. We believe that it is important to articulate our experience and our understanding of God. Nevertheless, I think we must admit that we cannot truly and fully comprehend the mystery of grace offered in the Eucharist. We cannot understand the "how" of the sacraments. To focus on what we cannot comprehend may distract us from what we do know – that in the mystery of Holy Communion we are able to connect with Jesus in a very profound way. When we come to the altar with hearts full of love for God and with a humble spirit, God may touch us so deeply that our souls are revived and our lives made new.

Never forget that the risen Lord Jesus does not leave his friends alone. Alleluia and amen.