

# SEE THE WAY

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Text: Luke 24:13-35

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## SCRIPTURE

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Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then 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?" He 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and 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. Some 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." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But 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. 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; 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 got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God!**

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## SERMON

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If you were here last week, we heard the story from the Gospel of John, telling of the Risen Christ appearing to his disciples, and how Thomas was not with them. At first, when they told Thomas what had happened, Thomas said he would not believe unless he could touch Jesus. He insisted on being able to put his finger on the scars left by nails of the cross. He was not going to believe what the other disciples said. He was not even going to believe his own eyes. He had to touch Jesus before he would accept that Jesus was truly risen from the dead.

We sometimes say seeing is believing, but Thomas is right. We cannot always trust our eyes. We cannot always be sure of what we think we are seeing. That is the basis of every sleight of hand magic trick. Let me show you what I mean. (*I did a little trick making a handkerchief disappear and then reappear again.*) I have a little handkerchief here, and it really is very not useful to me because I am always losing it. It never is where I think it is. It seems to just disappear. Now, it is a rather wispy thing, and can easily be blown away. So sometimes I try to pack it in tight, so I know exactly where it is. But even then, it just seems to vanish into thin air. And it is gone. But then again, you never know just when or where it might turn up.

Okay, well, a magic trick is just that. It is a trick. It is meant to fool you, to get you to see something, or actually not see something that is really there. Let's try something else, something that is not sleight of hand. Instead, it is a little puzzle. Up on the screen you will see some letters.

FOIRVEALENTTGEERS

They don't make much sense. So the challenge is to remove five letters, so that the remaining letters, without alternating their sequence will spell out a familiar English word. If you want to use a pencil and write them down on your bulletin, you may do so. Take a minute and see if you can figure it out... All right, don't say it out loud, but if you know what the word is raise your hand. For those of you who have not figured it out, will it help if I do this?

fOiRveAleNttGeErs

What about this?

f i v e l e t t e r s  
O R A N G E

The word is orange. Sometimes it is hard to see what is right in front of us. Sometimes we are looking in the wrong place, and not seeing what is really there. Sometimes we filter things out because of some preset ideas. When I said remove five letters, many of you were thinking of the quantity five, rather than the letters of the words "five letters." Sometimes we just lack the imagination to see more than what is there.

Our scripture lesson for this morning is about two people who could not see what was right in front of them. This was due, in part, because they were looking in the wrong place and not seeing what was really there. But it was also due to their preset ideas and frankly a lack of imagination. It is another story of the Risen Christ appearing to his followers, the first appearance recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Two people were on the road walking to a village called Emmaus, talking about what had happened over the last few days. Then it says, "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him."

They couldn't see what was right in front of their eyes. It is surprising when you consider the situation. Luke only gives the name of one of these two travelers, Cleopas. But the Gospel of John names four women standing at the foot of the cross. One of them is referred to as Mary, the wife of Clopas, and many scholars believe Clopas and Cleopas are one and the same. Because of this there are those who believe that these two walking along the road are not two men, but Cleopas and Mary, husband and wife. Furthermore, since this Mary was at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus, it is entirely possible that they are related in some way to Jesus. In fact, one legend is that Cleopas was the brother of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, making him his uncle.

All this is speculation and supposition. However, we do know that Cleopas and his companion were not part of the eleven apostles, for Luke mentions the eleven later on. But that does not mean they were not close to Jesus. In fact, they might have known him longer than any of the apostles. If they were indeed relatives, they might have known him since he was a child. Yet, they did not recognize him as they walked along the way. They could not see what was right in front of them.

Every now and then, I meet someone who says, "I just don't get it. I mean I suppose that there must be a God, but I have never felt like I was in God's presence or that God was in some way speaking to me. Whenever I pray it just seems like I am talking to myself." Maybe you have said something like that at one time or another. Maybe that's the way you feel right now. When you are feeling like that, it is not helpful for someone to say, "What do you mean, 'you don't get it'? Open your eyes. It is right there in front of you. Isn't it obvious?"

But then, Cleopas and his companion didn't get it at first either. We all have to admit that there have been times when we have been unable to see what should have been obvious. The good news for this morning is that our eyes can be opened and we can become aware of Christ's presence as we walk along the way.

Our scripture lesson is the story of a transition from one place to another, but it is more than the walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. There are three other transitions going on. They are transitions we all should be working on for they take us on a process that opens our eyes. The first transition we can see begins in verse 22. Cleopas is describing what had happened that morning and says, "Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and 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."

Cleopas says that the disciples were all astounded. Now the Greek word for "astounded" means literally "moved out of place." The disciples were moved out of place or relocated so that nothing seemed familiar or recognizable. In other words, they were very confused. The first transition we see in this story is from confusion to understanding. The proclamation of the angels that Jesus had risen left the disciples bewildered and confused. They could not figure out what was going on, but by the time it was all over they began to understand.

There are times when things connected with God can be confusing. Of course they are. Anyone who could easily grasp and comprehend everything there is to know about God would have to be equal with God. But no one on this earth is in that position. The most spiritual, holiest person you have ever encountered has moments when he or she is baffled or confused. There is that old saying, "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." The smartest theologians who have devoted their whole lives to studying about God still say from time to time, "This doesn't make any sense."

But anything worth learning or knowing is confusing at first. Do you remember when you tried to learn a new skill, like playing a musical instrument, or how to knit or how to play golf? Do you remember how confusing it was? There were so many things you had to think about all at the same time. There were too many instructions to follow. Every time you tried, you forgot something and didn't do it right. There were many times when it was all a mess and you just wanted to give up. But the more you worked at it, the more you remembered. The more you remembered, the more you were able to understand.

There is nothing wrong with being confused. The problem is giving up and not trying to understand. There are many who shrug and say, "The Bible is just too hard to read, and all the things they do at church don't make sense to me. I give up. I just don't get it." But faith is a skill. Faith takes practice. God wants to help us move from confusion to understanding.

The second transition is found in verse 27, where it says, "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." As Jesus walked with these two along the way, he started with something they were already familiar with. They knew the scriptures and so that was where Jesus began. But that was just the starting point. He took them off into directions they never thought were remotely possible. He took them from one dimensional thinking to multi-dimensional thinking. That is the second transition, from one dimension to multi dimensions.

The exercise we did with removing five letters touches on the essence of this transition. One dimensional thinking is linear, following from point A to point B. It follows a familiar pattern. When I said five, I must have meant the quantity of five. How could I have meant anything else? Likewise, the Jewish people at the time of Christ had one dimensional familiar patterns when it came to scripture. They thought they knew what the word "messiah" meant. The Messiah was a conquering military hero. What else could he be?

But when Jesus started explaining to Cleopas and his companion how his death and resurrection were all part of God's plan, all foretold in scripture, he was taking them off into new dimensions. It was all something completely unknown and beyond anything they had ever imagined. It had never entered their minds. If we want to progress in our faith; if we want to have our eyes opened; if we want to make the transition from confusion to understanding, we have to be willing to go from one dimensional to multi-dimensional thinking.

The third transition is found in verses 30 and 31. Luke tells us that "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." When were their eyes opened? When he did something very simple. He took an ordinary piece of bread, gave thanks to God, and then shared it with them. Jesus did something very routine and mundane, but the results were something holy. That is the third transition, from the mundane to the holy.

This transition is probably the most difficult for us. We have a hard time seeing common things as anything more than routine and mundane. The Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, wrote an interesting book called *The Screwtape Letters*. It is supposedly a collection of letters from a senior devil named Screwtape, written to a devil trainee offering advice on how to tempt human beings. Screwtape says that if we humans insist on going to church on Sunday, then the thought the devils must keep in our heads is just how ordinary everything is. We must not be allowed to think about how we are all connected as the Body of Christ, spread out across the world, and down through history, as a powerful unstoppable force. No, the devils want us to think about how it is too hot or too cold in here, attendance this morning is either up or down, and there's a typo in the bulletin, and what on earth was she thinking when she decided to wear that? Because when we are thinking about all those things, it is not hard for them to put the next thought in our heads: How can anything important or holy happen when everything is so common, routine and mundane?

But that is exactly how God works, moving everything from the mundane to the holy. This transition permeates the gospel stories; those stories we heard in our sermon series through February and March. Jesus uses very ordinary objects to do wonderful things. He takes jars of water used for washing and turns it into wine. He takes a little boy's tuna fish sandwich and feeds 5,000 people. Jesus told stories about common ordinary objects, coins, seeds, cloth, lamps, wineskins. And he told stories about ordinary people, farm workers, fathers and sons, shepherds, widows, beggars, tax collectors and even a Samaritan. But with these stories he spoke of the holy, of extraordinary ideas about God and how God interacts with all of us.

So those are the three transitions on the road to Emmaus: from confusion to understanding, from one dimensional to multi-dimensional thinking, from the mundane to the holy. Sometimes we are unable to see Jesus because we just can't make it down the road. We become overwhelmed by all that is going on at once. We refuse to step out into anything that is not familiar. We just can't seem to believe that anything so common and ordinary could possibly have deeper significance. Our eyes remain shut and we just don't get it.

But then we have this story of two followers of Jesus trudging along the dusty road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. The Risen Christ joins them as they walk, a stranger at first. But by the end of the trip they have been changed, moving from discouragement and despair to hope and faith. Their hearts burn with excitement. That is the road each of us can walk.

The road to Emmaus is the way. That was the first name for Christians, "Followers of the Way." The church, when it is doing what it should be doing, is a group of people walking on a road, helping each other along. Then, wonder of wonders, the Risen Christ appears. If you want to experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then get up each morning, put one foot in front of the other and head down the road. See where your way might take you. But if you set out eagerly seeking understanding, open to other dimensions, longing for the holy, you will see your way home. Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.