

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Luke 24:13-35

This week we look at a specific post-resurrection interaction that Jesus had with a couple of disciples. From what we can decipher from the Gospel accounts this was the 2<sup>nd</sup> appearance of Jesus, post-resurrection (the first appearance being to Mary Magdalene in the garden outside the tomb...see John 20:10-18).

What is intriguing about both of these appearances, as well as subsequent appearances that we'll see next week, is that the post-resurrection body of Jesus is different enough in appearance that He was not easily recognizable, and (most interesting) He doesn't seem bound to the typical laws of nature that we're used to (i.e. appearing and disappearing).

I would encourage a rereading of I Corinthians 15 to get Paul's take on resurrection. Theologically speaking, this is good and important for us to be familiar with. But for our present purposes, it is worth noting I Corinthians 15:42b-44a, "*The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*" (Though we need to be careful, "spiritual" does NOT mean non-physical. Jesus' body, as well as our own resurrected body, is physical/material, but will be uncorrupted and of higher quality.)

The 3 Cardinal Virtues of the Christian faith are Faith, Hope, and Love. Let's camp on hope for a bit. The resurrection has always been tied to hope. Why is that? What is it about resurrection that brings us hope? This is an important question and concept for us to grasp. We (modern day Christians) tend to think of "heaven" when we think about hope. ("Hope" means expectant joy, and thus is future oriented...i.e. something good will happen in the future.) So hope is faith/trust in something in the future. And like all things trust/faith related, there is reason (a fundamental fact) that it is tied to. So we hope for a future resurrection because of the resurrection of Jesus. He is the prototype, which all humanity will follow. Notice the Apostle's Creed (one of the earliest "doctrinal statements" in Christian history):

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth  
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended to the dead and on the third day rose again  
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead  
I believe in the Holy Spirit  
In the holy catholic church  
In the communion of saints  
In the forgiveness of sins  
In the resurrection of the body  
And in life everlasting. Amen.*

While “heaven” is mentioned a couple of times, it simply designates and differentiates God’s space versus our space. “Heaven” in the mind of the Biblical writers is the non-visible space all around us. So in that sense (and the proper way of understanding it) heaven and earth are interlinked and overlapping. Heaven is not some far off place. Nor is it our goal or ultimate destination. Resurrection in incorruptible bodies on a restored/renewed earth, with heaven and earth as one, is our destiny. This is our hope. And the reason for this hope is Jesus’ resurrection combined with His promises. So it is a reasonable hope. Both the incarnation (God becoming flesh) and the resurrection (again, a physical body) is God’s stamp of approval on the goodness of the physical/material creation. So we need to beware of any dualistic (and gnostic or pagan) notions that promote the “spiritual” as superior to the “physical”. Both are created by God and are originally good, and are being restored.

Now back to our friends along the road to Emmaus (Cleopas and, likely, his wife Mary). While we are less familiar with these two, since we tend to focus our attention on “the 12 disciples” it is important to remember that there were other “disciples” too (the 12 just get the added designation of being “apostles” and had some extra attention and training/apprenticing from Jesus). In the gospel accounts, for example, Joseph of Arimathea was also called a “disciple” (see John 19:38), and likely Nicodemus was one too. Additionally, in the book of Acts “believer” and “disciple” are used interchangeably, and from Acts chapter 1, we know that there were 120 gathered together in Jerusalem prior to Pentecost. Why Jesus decided to appear to Cleopas and Mary is anybody’s guess. Perhaps it was because they were headed to Emmaus and Jesus wanted them to stay in Jerusalem. It sort of fits the picture of a Shepherd. A couple from His flock are starting to stray, out of disappointment, so Jesus gently points them back to Jerusalem by walking and talking with them, breaking bread with them (and thus disclosing Himself to them), knowing that it would cause them to rush back to Jerusalem in excitement.

I recently read the book “Water to Wine” by Brian Zahnd (a favorite of mine...I’d recommend anything by him). In it, he has a little section on this passage that I’d like to share with you:

*The church in the post-Christendom West is walking the Emmaus road, confused and disappointed, just like those two disciples on the first Easter (see Luke 24:13-35). Of course, the point of the Emmaus road story was that the two disciples had misread everything. Their disappointment was a result of their wrong expectations. They expected a conventional king after the model of the Pharaohs and Caesars. They expected Jesus to be a war-waging Messiah like King David or Judah Maccabeus. With those expectations they saw Jesus as a “failed” Messiah—a peace-preaching Messiah who ended up being executed by the Romans. Instead of kingdom come, it was Christ crucified—a dead end. As far as Cleopas and the other disciple were concerned, the movement in which they had invested all their hopes and dreams had failed. There was nothing to do now but go back home. So they walked the Emmaus road carrying a load of soul-crushing disappointment. This is when Jesus came and walked with them “in another form” (Mark 16:12). When Jesus in the guise of a wayfaring stranger joined the disappointed disciples and remarked upon their evident sadness, they explained how they had hoped that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would redeem Israel. But that was all over. Their hopes had been dashed when their would-be Messiah was*

condemned by the priests and crucified by the Romans. Their movement had failed and disappointment had settled in. This is when the stranger embarked upon a long discourse through Moses and the Prophets explaining how suffering and even death were not incompatible with Messiah entering into his glorious reign—in fact, the Scriptures had foretold this very thing. That Sunday afternoon walk to Emmaus was the ultimate Old Testament survey class. As the sun was setting, the three travelers arrived at Emmaus. After first feigning that he would continue his journey alone, the stranger accepted an invitation to share a meal with the two disciples. As they sat together at table in the fading light of that first Easter, the stranger surprisingly assumed the role of host. He took the bread, spoke the ancient Jewish blessing, broke the bread, and, when he offered the bread...something astonishing happened! For a fleeting moment the two disciples recognized the stranger as...Jesus! Then he vanished! Poof! Gone! But the bread Jesus had been holding in his hands fell to the table. The blessed, broken, and offered bread hit the table with an emphatic thump! Jesus had been recognized for an ephemeral instant, then he had vanished. But in his place the bread remained. Don't miss that. The bread remained! The two disciples rushed back to Jerusalem to announce the good news that Jesus was risen. "They told what had happened on the road, and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35). Here we behold the eucharistic mystery, the sacred mystery that after Easter Christ is with us in another form, in the blessed and broken bread. This is the point of the dramatic gesture at the climactic moment in the Emmaus road story—Jesus is present as bread on the table! Of course, this is a very different presence than what was anticipated by either the Emmaus road disciples or the heirs of Christendom. What both wanted was a conventional king on a throne of political power. What they got was broken bread on the Communion table. The false hope for the kingdom of Christ to be one of conventional political power was always bound to disappoint those who fail to understand the true nature of this new kingdom, whether it's the Emmaus Road disciples, the architects of Christendom, or the modern-day Religious Right. Jesus will not be with us as a means of conventional political power. Jesus will be with us as bread on the table. Christ is present as sacramental mystery, not political action committee. Blessed are they who are not disappointed. For those Christians who dreamed of shaping the culture through political pressure and legislative coercion, these are days of anger, frustration, and disappointment. That experiment has failed and it cannot be repeated. Christendom is dead. But Christ is alive! For those who are willing to enter the sacramental mystery of Christ present as bread on the table, these are days of new opportunity. Instead of thinking politically, we are learning to think sacramentally. The way forward is far less political and far more mystical. A generation ago the great Catholic theologian Karl Rahner famously predicted, "The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic', one who has 'experienced' something, or he will cease to be anything at all." [2] The future of Christianity belongs to the Thomas Merton kind of Christian, not the heirs of Jerry Falwell. This should be seen as a welcome change. It is only our false hopes that are being disappointed in the death of Christendom. Jesus never intended to change the world through battlefields or voting booths. Jesus has always intended to transform the world one life at a time at a shared table. At the church I pastor we no longer hand out "Christian voting guides," but every Sunday we offer "the body of Christ broken for you." I'm not the least bit angry or even disappointed that Christendom has failed and that we now live in what might be described as a secular age. For one thing, it may not be that our age is as much secular as it is

*simply post-Christendom. The church in the West is finally coming out from under the long shadow of Constantine and we're trying to figure out what comes next. We too are walking the Emmaus road, learning to recognize Jesus in another form. We no longer have political power. What we do have is the mystery of the Eucharist. We offer the world the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. That is more than enough! So today our sermons don't end with, "Go write your senator and lobby Washington." Our sermons end with, "Come to the table and share in the life of Christ." Christ is present with us. He is present in the Eucharist. He is bread on the table. This is enough. I am not disappointed. My heart burns within me. In the mystery of the Eucharist, God in Christ chooses to make himself present to humanity by ordinary elements. Through grain and grape, we find Christ present in the world. But it's not unprocessed grain and grape that we find on the Communion table, it's bread and wine. Grain and grape come from God's good earth, but bread and wine are the result of human industry. Bread and wine come about through a cooperation of the human and the divine. And herein lies a beautiful mystery. If grain and grape made bread and wine can communicate the body and blood of Christ, this has enormous implications for all legitimate human labor and industry. The mystery of the Eucharist does nothing less than make all human labor sacred. For there to be the holy sacrament of Communion there must be grain and grape, wheat fields and vineyards, bakers and winemakers. Human labor becomes a sacrament, a farmer planting wheat, a vintner tending vines, a miller grinding wheat, a winemaker crushing grapes, a woman baking bread, a man making wine, a trucker hauling bread, a grocer selling wine. Who knows what bread or what wine might end up on the Communion table as the body and blood of Christ. This is where we discover the holy mystery that all labor necessary for human flourishing is sacred. A farmer plowing his field, a worker in a bakery, a trucker hauling goods, a grocer selling wares—all are engaged in work that is just as sacred as the priest or pastor serving Communion on Sunday. The Eucharist pulls back the curtain to reveal a sacramental world.*

Zahnd, Brian. *Water To Wine: Some of My Story* (pp. 131-136). Spello Press. Kindle Edition.

Jesus is, indeed, still present with us today: in His indwelling Spirit in each believer; in His Body (the church); and in the Eucharist. And the way He designed it is that He would be recognized in these ways: in how individual believers conduct themselves, following His teaching and example; in His Body being an alternative society/order to the existing one; and in the symbols that draw attention to His death and His resurrection. (Since He's not in the grave, there is no headstone to mark a tomb. So these three markers point people toward the reality of the resurrection and new life.)

- Q. Describe a disappointment you have endured in your life? How did you get through/past it?**
- Q. How do you typically deal with disappointment? (What's your coping mechanism?)**
- Q. Where do you place your hope? (i.e. what are you looking forward to, and what is your basis for that?)**

- Q. What implication of the resurrection is most meaningful to you?**
- Q. In what ways are Christian/the Church today confused and disappointed? (What is the reason behind that, in your opinion?)**
- Q. The two on the road to Emmaus were disappointed because they had hoped for change...change that looked a particular way. Instead of glory they saw suffering. Instead of a throne (symbolizing political power) they saw a cross (symbolizing political oppression). BUT, the fact is Jesus did bring change...it just wasn't the type of change they were expecting. In the way of Jesus, in the Kingdom economy, shared bread around a table creates powerful change. So with all that said, what changes would you like to see in the world? How do you expect that change to occur? What are you willing to do to participate in making that change possible? Does that look more like the world's way of change through coercive, manipulative, perhaps violent power; or the power of sacrificial love and inclusive fellowship?**
- Q. What examples/illustrations can you think of that demonstrate that change (or glory) comes through suffering?**
- Q. Why do you think Jesus took the time to explain the Scriptures to these 2 disciples as opposed to simply revealing Himself to them from the outset?**
- Q. Describe a time when Jesus surprised you.**