

Thomas R. Cook  
Sermon #474 Trinity Church – Swarthmore, PA  
8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The Third Sunday of Easter – April 6, 2008

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## “The Road to Emmaus”

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Scripture: Luke 24:12-35; 3 Easter A

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Poor Cleopas. His world is shattered. His hopes lie utterly in ruins. So he tastes the dust of the ancient road, feels it sting his eyes and invade his nostrils while he shuffles along with another forlorn friend on the way that leads to the village of Emmaus. My guess is it doesn't really matter to them where they are going, as long as they are going away from Jerusalem. He is dead, their friend and their savior, Jesus. And the two companions are deep in mourning. In a real sense these two men are likely running, not with quick feet and beating hearts and gasping breath, you understand, but running away from grief, away from the danger in Jerusalem which threatens them as followers of the condemned political agitator, Jesus, away from fear, away from the other men and women in the city with whom they had shared their hope in the teacher from Galilee, men and women who now are hiding out in sadness and disillusionment, passing around wistful rumors that Jesus really is not dead. They had to get out, Cleopas and his companion. It was all too much. They had to run away from failure and disappointment and false hopes. Emmaus was likely as good a place as any.

You know what I think? I think the road to Emmaus is one of the most highly

traveled of all roads. The traffic must be unbelievable. It must rival the worst of the worst city rush hours anywhere in the world. It must be jammed with travelers end to end, pressed against one another, pushing forward to some destination, any destination, as long as it's away from where things started. And am I right to imagine that you know this road? All of you? That we have walked it before; maybe we're walking it right now. It's the road away from disappointment, the road away from sorrow and pain, the road away from the grim realities which intrude upon our hopes and dreams and desires, shaking our foundations and challenging our very lives. It's the road upon which we run away from sickness, from sadness, from aging, from death. It's the road along which we run from our incessant doubts, our broken hopes and shattered dreams. Cleopas voices it so well: "We had hoped that [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel." But with Jesus dead and the dream come to an end, the road to Emmaus was all that was left to him. And, so, he took it. He ran away. He left Jesus, and all he had meant to him, behind.

Funny, isn't it, that it is upon this very road that Cleopas meets his savior. And it isn't as though the disciple spots Jesus along the way and runs to him and asks what has happened, how this can be, where he has been. He doesn't shout out: "I've been looking for you!" No, Cleopas is beaten. He does nothing. Yet as Cleopas makes his way along the road, it is Jesus who makes his way to him. It does not matter that Cleopas cannot recognize the savior, that his grief has impaired his vision, that his broken heart cannot accept the miracle that shuffles along the road with him. Jesus walks at his side just the

same. He listens to Cleopas' lament; he hears his disappointment; he challenges his lack of faith, and presses for new understanding. He stays by Cleopas' side despite the morose and pitiful and, likely, very unpleasant, company of this traveling companion. And when Cleopas begins to feel something different, something new, something hopeful in the midst of this traveling despair, he opens his heart just a little. "Won't you stay with us?" he asks. "Not really so much because it matters to me, you understand, but the day is nearly over." I think Cleopas is beginning to see...

Now it is this that I want us to notice on this Sunday morning when we remember Jesus' resurrection: We had hoped... We had hoped... We had hoped for that new job. We had hoped our marriage could last forever. We had hoped for a cure. We had hoped our family would grow. We had hoped to be together with our loved ones. We had hoped...\* So often our hopes lead us onto that road to Emmaus, that road away from despair. And it is upon this very road that Jesus meets the broken-hearted. In fact, it is upon this very road that he seeks them out. And lest we feel continually confused by this lesson in hope, think back upon a time in life when all seemed to be wrong, when grief was the principal reality, when darkness was overcoming any sense of light. Did someone come to you with a kind word of hope and comfort? Did someone express their condolence, their solidarity and empathy with your suffering? Was there anyone who might have simply said: "I am praying for you?" Or perhaps a congregation remembered you in prayer in a time of difficulty. If our hearts can open even a little bit, we may just see Jesus' upon that

road to Emmaus when we walk it. Maybe we ask him to stay a while. We begin to feel again that we are not entirely alone, nor are we permanently without hope. And all this not because of something we do, but of something we simply receive.

It is the beauty and integrity of faith in Jesus Christ that we trust that God acts for us even before we know we need to ask. That what makes Christianity so powerful is that Jesus comes to us to offer renewed life even when we don't deserve it. Our lives change because we receive this gracious gift of love. We don't have to make those changes on our own and do all the right things to please God, and then hope that God gives us something we deserve. When we walk that road to Emmaus, and we all will walk it sometimes, don't be terribly surprised that the Lord will seek you out, just as he sought his disciple Cleopas, whose life was so radically changed that we still remember to this day that he recognized Jesus when he received the bread from him which we have come to know as Holy Communion. And we will receive it again for ourselves this day. And by this we know the Lord is risen indeed.

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\* Modeled after [Synthesis](#) article from 3 Easter A 2008 – Postscript.