

April 30, Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:13-35

by [Jeffrey M. Gallagher](#) in the [April 12, 2017](#) issue

The Cleveland Indians' locker room after a ten-inning game seven. Hillary Clinton's campaign headquarters early on November 9. The emergency room after an unsuccessful tracheotomy. A quiet office after a pink slip is found on the desk. A lonely bathroom where a plus sign just won't appear on a pregnancy test.

This is where Cleopas and his companion find themselves. They've lost. They're defeated. They poured their whole lives and selves into following this man they knew was the savior. They gave up everything to follow him. Then he died—defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory. The one who was supposed to deliver them all couldn't even deliver himself from the cross.

This isn't how the story was supposed to end. Remember the waving palms? What about the victory and celebrating and God's kingdom coming to earth? All of it gone.

Now they find themselves walking down a road to Emmaus. It's likely not even an actual, physical place. Frederick Buechner quips that Emmaus is the place where "we throw up our hands and say 'Let the whole damned thing go to hang. It makes no difference anyway.'" It's the place of desolation. It's the young mother holding her stillborn child in her arms, walking around the delivery room, with no idea where to go or what to do.

And then the miraculous: Jesus comes near! But unfortunately "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Why don't they see him, the one they put their faith in and left everything for? Are tears clouding their vision? Are they simply unable to pick their heads up from watching the dust stirred by their sandals on the ground before them?

Luke leaves those details to our imaginations. We only know that Jesus invites them to tell their story. I imagine Jesus saying, with perfect pastoral sensitivity, *So tell me what things have been like for you over these past few days.* And they share. They

share what it was like to look across Golgotha and see the Roman guards celebrating their victory, what it was like to walk through Jerusalem and be laughed at by those who never thought Jesus was the Messiah. They share what it was like to flee the city, fearful that they might be crucified next—to start toward a destination unknown because they simply can't stay where they are. They share what it is like to feel defeated, deflated, and alone.

They do this on Easter Sunday. Luke says this is still the "same day" when the women went to the tomb and then told the others what they heard and saw: not just the missing body but the angels saying that Jesus is alive. Yet Cleopas and his companion can't see past the empty tomb, which is no sign of victory to them.

So Jesus tries to explain it all: *Don't you understand that this is all part of the plan? We talked about this. Don't you remember?* Clearly they do not. This should come as no surprise; they never do. Jesus' disciples just don't ever seem to get it—no matter how many times he tries to tell them.

By now it's gotten late. So they offer him a place to lay his head for the night—not because he's Jesus, just because it's the hospitable thing to do. They sit down to a meal together, and their guest takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them.

Takes, blesses, breaks, gives—how many times have they seen him do that before? Around the table, surely. But when else? When he took a young child to his knee, blessed her, broke through the disease that held her captive, and then gave her back to her parents newly healed? When he went into the temple and approached the money changer's stand? Maybe he said a prayer before breaking it down and then handing it, in pieces, back to the money changer, saying that he would do this and more in the days to come? They probably didn't understand what he was doing then, either. But they saw him take, bless, break, and give; they have seen this pattern before.

They must have, because in this moment their eyes are opened. It isn't when he comes near them; it isn't when he walks with them; it isn't when he tries to explain it all to them, again. It is when he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives them bread—something so ordinary that they have seen it before, time and time again.

It's only then that the tears give way, their heads look up from the table, and they finally see who has been journeying with them. Jesus is alive after all! The tomb, the

angels, the women—can it really be true? It is all coming back to them now—they see. And then, in an instant, they see no more. He is gone.

Is this not the way God so often enters our lives? Not in the miraculous, but in ordinary taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. In the hug of a friend we haven't seen in a while, in the laughter of a child frolicking in the grass that has finally surfaced from beneath the snow, in breaking a trail through the woods, in giving to the food pantry, in blessing an evening meal: we recognize God.

With our eyes opened in the midst of this everyday reality, we are reminded that all is not lost. We are not defeated or alone. Love has won; Easter is here to stay. We see, and we begin to understand—and in that instant, Emmaus is gone.