

“Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread”
Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116:12-19
Third Sunday of Easter

Psalm 116:12-19

¹²What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,

¹⁴I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.

¹⁶O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Luke 24:13-27

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸Then 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?”

¹⁹He 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,²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

²¹“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.

²²“Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.”

²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;

and he vanished from their sight.

³²They 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?”

³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Sermon

What is God already doing in your world?

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This one conversation among two disciples and Jesus has set the table for all Christian worship to follow.

As they walk along, two disciples talk with each other about things they've been through recently.

Someone whom they identify as a stranger asks them to tell the story, and they testify to Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and they recount the events of the crucifixion and the word about his resurrection.

Then Jesus—though they still don't recognize him in the stranger—interprets back to them the things about himself in the scriptures, beginning with Moses and the Old Testament prophets.

Then there is an invitation to stay and eat with them, which is accepted.

And when they are at the table together, there is communion, served by Jesus, the guest who has become host: "he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."

And then he vanishes from their sight.

That episode sets the table for all subsequent Christian worship:

The people gather, sharing their experiences and the feelings in their hearts; the stranger is welcomed into the fellowship and participates in the conversation;

the word of God is recounted and interpreted;

and, in communion, the presence of Jesus is revealed—not long enough for them to hold onto him and reduce him back to a mere physical presence, but just long enough for them to recognize his presence.

It started with two disciples, who were, as the NRSV translates, just “walking along,” talking about what they had experienced and how it was affecting them, the way people like you and me walk along all the time:

dealing with what we have seen and felt and heard,
and trying to cope with the amazements,
the sadnesses,
the disappointments,
the traumas,
and the hopes we’d had,
and our uncertainty as to whether those hopes are being realized.

What is God already doing, right now, in your world, as you walk along?

Jesus uses exactly the same word for walking, in the same verb tense, one other time in Luke, when he had been invited to dine at the home of one of the Pharisees, who was amazed and evidently disgusted that Jesus had failed to observe the establishment-approved, ritual washing before dinner.

And Jesus said, “You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside, you’re full of greed and wickedness.

“Don’t you know the one who made the outside is the same one who made the inside? If you give for alms those things that are within, you’ll see that everything will be clean for you.”

And then he said, “But woe to you Pharisees; you tithe [the proper things], mint and rue and herbs of all kinds; but you neglect justice and the love of God; *That’s* what you ought to have practiced.”

And then, he said: woe to you who love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces: “for you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it.”

In other words, those who get the outward rituals right, while not giving a rip about how people are actually doing—which goes hand in hand with not caring much about God—those people who show off their religious superiority without any humanity to back it up, are in fact unrecognized by, and irrelevant to, the public, in a similar way to unmarked graves that people just walk over without even realizing it when they’re just ambling, just “walking along.”

“Did you know you just walked over a gravesite?”

“No... There was no sign or anything, I had no idea that I was violating a sacred space; I was just walking along...”

Like these dejected disciples are just “walking along” when Jesus joins them. And there is something they don’t seem to be realizing, either.

There are a couple of different versions of that Greek word that Luke uses: They use the same root word (*peripateo*), as in “peripatetic,” somebody who travels from place to place. But the difference is a level of intentionality and purpose, which is why the NRSV translates Jesus’ term in Luke 24:17 not just as “walking” but as “walking along.” It’s the same use as when he describes the Pharisees as being like unmarked graves that people step on unknowingly when they’re just, you know, walking along.

The other times Luke uses that word for walking, it’s with purpose: it’s used as an indicative rather than a participle (which I’m sure is fascinating to somebody).

When the Pharisees didn’t like the way Jesus healed a paralyzed person, he said, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’” (Luke 5:17-23).

There’s strength and purpose in that kind of walk.

When disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask if he was the one that Israel had been waiting for, Jesus sent them back to John with a message: “The blind receive their sight, the lame (*χωλοὶ*) walk (*περιπατοῦσιν*), the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (7:18-23).

Those who are unable to walk, *choloι*, walk—*peripatousin*. There’s an intentionality to that walk; it’s a simple, indicative, present tense word: *they / walk*.

There’s also an intentionality and purpose implied when Jesus says, “Beware of the scribes, who like *to walk* around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets” (Luke 20:41-21:4). They go out walking around with a purpose, which is to be seen and honored by everyone else.

These disciples, just after the horrible, disorienting events of the crucifixion of their hero, the one they had hoped was going to be the one who would redeem Israel—they seem to be walking with very little purpose now. The testimony of the women who encountered an angel at the empty tomb just seems to leave them baffled.

By the time Jesus finds them, they're just walking along, and no wonder they don't recognize him: they are not looking for him; they are not expecting him. He accuses them of being slow to believe what the prophets had said, and for all we know—for all they know—maybe they always were.

What's on your mind as you walk along?

I mean, what's on your mind today, this morning?

In Christian Wiman's book *My Bright Abyss*, he says: "The endless, useless urge to look on life comprehensively, to take a bird's-eye view of ourselves and judge the dimensions of what we have or have not done: this is life as landscape, or life as a résumé.

"But," he says, "life is incremental, and though a worthwhile life is a gathering together of all that one is, good and bad, successful and not, the paradox is that we can never really see this one thing that all of our increments...add up to."

I like his idea that as we experience this life, as we walk along it, by increments—day by day, minute by minute, decision by decision, adding one tiny little bit at a time onto the epic story of our life that, perhaps we are too "close to" ever to be able to see as a totality.

We know God is in the totality of our life. But where is God at work in the things that are on your mind right now, at the incremental stage of your life where you find yourself right now, or this week, or this month?

I cannot guarantee, but I hope and wish and pray, that you will feel your heart burning within you, once you see where God is already at work in the immediate, specific situations and circumstances of your life—especially the ones that sadden or scare you, or where you are disappointed or feeling hopeless.

But whether or not you can feel it or perceive it, I *can* guarantee that God is there, and is already at work.

“As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on”—an intentional walk.

And they persuaded him—this one whom they thought was a stranger—to stay with them, and eat with them.

And 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.

He found them as they were walking along, and he walked with them. They thought they were having to catch this stranger up on all the news, but then he ended up outdistancing them in his understanding of what had happened.

But they still didn't figure out that Jesus, whom they thought they had lost for good, was actually right there with them.

So they continued walking, and he made like he was going to walk on ahead of them.

They got him to slow down long enough to stay with them awhile, and the guest became the host, and he blessed God and broke bread and gave it to them;

and then, he vanished.

Which is to say: he went on ahead of them yet again.

That's what pioneers do. He went on ahead.

The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews says of Jesus, “It was fitting that God, in bringing many children to glory, should make the *pioneer* of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10).

Therefore...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the *pioneer and perfecter* of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the

right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart” (Hebrews 12:1).

That’s what pioneers do. They go on ahead, and they absorb the suffering involved in making a way so that others who come after them may not grow weary or lose heart.

If you visit any Major League Baseball stadium, take a look around, and somewhere you will see, on the outfield wall or some other prominent place, a giant number 42. That’s because on April 15, 1997, at Shea Stadium in New York, Jackie Robinson’s uniform was officially retired. People who aren’t interested in sports may not know that when a player has been so overwhelmingly important to a sports team that nobody could ever take their place, that organization, in whatever sport, collegiate or professional, can retire that player’s uniform number so that no future player on that team will ever wear that number again.

Jackie Robinson was the first African American player in Major League Baseball, and for that, he endured unimaginable amounts of openly racist abuse, taunting, physical threats against him and his family, harassment, insults, mockery, and attempts at humiliation. Through it all he retained his dignity and somehow never lost his temper on the field. When his number was retired in 1997, 25 years after his death, the commissioner of Major League Baseball said the obvious truth: that there should never have been a racial barrier to begin with.

On April 15, 1997, it was not just Jackie Robinson’s former team that retired his jersey number: every single team throughout Major League Baseball retired Jersey #42. And that’s why you’ll see a giant 42 somewhere in every major league stadium.ⁱ

He was so important, and suffered and endured so much for his excellence and his race, because when he broke through that barrier, others could follow, and with each African American who did follow, every baseball player, official, and fan took one more step toward redemption.

Jackie Robinson was the first: he led the way on that path of redemption, so that all of us could follow.

In 2010, Kenda Dean wrote,

“The gospel is God’s invitation...
to participate in the divine plan of salvation in Jesus Christ
and to rely on God’s goodness, not our own.
Only grace makes this kind of faith possible.
Imitating Christ makes people lay down their wallets,
their reputations,
their lives for the sake of others,
which is why parents rightly fear it for their children.”

What she calls “the cult of nice” is “so much safer;
[where] God is [just] friendly and predictable,
offering little
and asking less.”
That kind of weak theology that she calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
“does not ask people to lay down their lives for anyone,
because niceness does not go that far.
Love goes that far—”
and true love, she says, isn’t always necessarily “nice” or safe.ⁱⁱ

Where is God already at work in the situations going on in your life?

That part where they finally see Jesus in the breaking and receiving of the bread,
and then he immediately disappears, has given me some trouble in the past.

But Jesus keeps moving ahead of us, like tail lights on a car that’s way out ahead
on the highway: not trying to get away from you, but going further on to lead the
way to a destination.

We are now in the Easter season—for Christians, it’s always Easter—and now is
the time, as it always is, to trust in, to *bask* in, and to share the Good News.

We are being offered hope, and invited, and encouraged, to try to catch up with
what God is already doing in our lives and in the world.

Our savior keeps outpacing us, as we walk along, encouraging us to come on
already. Walk with purpose in this world, and engage in all the things Jesus
accused the Pharisees of not engaging in:

love for God,
and food for the hungry,
and love for the outcast,

and justice and mercy for everyone.

So let us not be too bothered by the feeling that every time we think we're just about to catch up enough to recognize him, he once again disappears from view.

We know that he, and his banquet table, and his open arms, will be waiting for us when we finally get to the finish line.

Keith Grogg
Montreat Presbyterian Church
Montreat, NC
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ⁱ All of the preceding information about Jackie Robinson and Major League Baseball is widely available; my source for this material is Hal Bodley, "Retiring No. 42 one of baseball's greatest moments" (MLB.com, April 11th, 2013), <http://m.mlb.com/news/article/44514982/retiring-no-42-one-of-baseballs-greatest-moments/>.

ⁱⁱ Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), .