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**Title:** Stay with Us

**Date:** April 29 & 30, 2017

**Preaching:** Senior Minister Randy Spleth

**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 15:3-11](#)

**Text:** [Luke 24:29-35](#)

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We have a wonderful story today, Emmaus Road. I hope you know it. It comes from the gospel of Luke and is a traditional lesson two weeks after Easter. Luke tells the most beautiful unique stories, like the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. Many who don't consider themselves Christian or

biblically literate know about the loving Father who graciously receives his errant son home or the good Sam who helps a neighbor in need. The Emmaus Road story is also unique to Luke and is just as powerful. But it is different. It isn't a moralistic story; rather, it is story about where and how we see our resurrected Savior.

See if it is familiar. Two grieving followers of Jesus, one named Cleopas and the other unnamed, walk home from Jerusalem on Easter afternoon. Jesus approaches them but they don't recognize him because Luke says, "...their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Jesus engages them in conversation and they readily participate. Some of us can relate. We talk to people in the mall, or in elevators. Others of you are more reserved. You take the childhood message, "Don't talk to strangers" to heart. They do think he is a stranger because "Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'" (Luke 24:18) Gregarious people can relate to talking to a stranger, particularly when there is safety in numbers. Cleopas and his companion are two; the stranger is one.

Jesus baits them on. "What things?" They tell the story of Jesus being handed over and crucified. The talk about the women finding an empty tomb and recall their vision of angels who suggested that Jesus was alive. But, sadly, some went back to the tomb and they don't find him.

Jesus responds, placing all that happened within the context of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. It must have been a lively conversation. Again, some of you might relate. You've struck up a conversation with a stranger waiting for a table in a restaurant or on an airplane flight. But in the day and age of terrorism and growing xenophobia, it stretches the imagination of even the most outgoing to open your home. But this is what Cleopas and his companion did. "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" (Luke 24: 28-29)

The entire passage revolves around those three little words. *Stay with us*. If they hadn't offered a place at their table and in their home, if they hadn't said, "stay with us", the story wouldn't be a story. It wouldn't be remembered. As foreign as the words are to us, it would have been unthinkable for them not to extend hospitality.

First century hospitality was deeply rooted in biblical tradition and the mandate to welcome strangers within a community. Every Jew knew the Deuteronomic command, "Do not mistreat a stranger 'You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.'" (Deuteronomy 10:19) They also knew the story of Abraham at Mamre who said to three strangers, "stay with us." Later he discovered that the three who he broke bread with were angels bearing the message of Sarah's pregnancy. Hospitality was a biblical mandate and in a culture without Fairfield Inn's and Marriott, it was essential. There were few inns and they were often inhabited by people of questionable character. Jewish travelers in the first century depended on "stay with us."

In our world where strangers are dangerous and hotels are plenty, it is hard to imagine saying to a complete stranger, "stay with us." But of course, we know he wasn't a complete stranger. We know it even if Cleopas and his companion didn't know it when they extended the invitation.

Does it bother you as much as me that I have to say, "Cleopas and his companion?" It bothers some. Throughout the ages, there has been a search for Cleopas and his companion. Cleopas doesn't show up again in scripture and his companion goes unnamed. Because the story is told with a narrator, some traditionalists think it was Luke himself. It is after all, his gospel. But we know that Luke was written fifty to sixty years later which stretches the imagination given first century life

expectancies. Scholars agree that the writer of Luke wasn't an eye witness.

Eusebius and the historian Origen believed the companion was Cleopas's son who he they named as Simon. A man named Simon took over the leadership of the church in Jerusalem in 62. These historians believed it was one and the same.<sup>1</sup>

Some think it was James and this has biblical support. The earliest resurrection testimony is found not in the gospels but in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. Paul writes about the appearance of Jesus, "...he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." (1 Corinthians 15:4b-7) Of course, just like we have a number of James in this congregation, there were many James.

The great Italian artist Caravaggio has one of the most famous painting of Emmaus Road. He was sure that Cleopas companion was James, the brother of John, the sons of Zebedee. James took the gospel to Spain and his symbol is the scallop shell baptismal font. If you look closely at this great painting, you can see a scallop shell on the coat of the one sitting to the left of Jesus. It is Caravaggio's statement that the companion was James. But James was a disciple and as such, it could not be him because of the story itself. Cleopas and the companion return to the disciples that night, to tell "the eleven" the Risen Lord.

We just don't know who it was who said, "*Stay with us*", but we do know what happened. When they invited him in, they went to the table and Jesus "...took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. (Luke 24: 30b)" Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's not just eating with them. He's reenacting his Last Supper where he took, blessed, broke and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, broken for you." The stranger doesn't just stay with them. The stranger has communion with them and suddenly, "... their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." (Luke 24:31a) As quickly as they recognized Jesus, he vanished. But they'd had that ah-ha moment, the moment of recognition and "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?" (Luke 24:32). Even though it was dark, they returned to Jerusalem and that told them where to find a risen

Savior. The Risen Savior is revealed in scripture and in the breaking of bread.

It's what this story is about. It's what separates it from stories like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. It's not about how to love or how to care for one another. It's about how to see, about where and how we see our resurrected Savior in our lives.

We are no different than Cleopas and his companion. Jesus is right there with them and they can't see him. They had to invite him to stay with them and then to break bread with them in order to recognize him. They had to reflect on their experience in scripture to realize that the heart burn they were experiencing wasn't lunch. It was Christ's presence in their lives. The Emmaus Road story is a model for how we find our resurrected Savior.

When we gather together, when we break bread, when we study scripture, Jesus can be revealed to us. To see him, we have to invite him to "Stay with us," we have to break bread with him, we have to let his word burn with in our hearts for us to see him. Sometimes, we will see him readily; other times, like the disciples, our eyes will be kept from recognizing him. But the possibility becomes much more remote if you don't invite Jesus to "Stay with you."

Throughout the years, I've had the conversation over and over again. I've had it with a few of you. I've had it with many others who are not here. It is a conversation about seeing. "I don't see Jesus. I'm not seeing him in my life or in the world. So, I'm dropping out, cutting back, pulling away from a regular worship." They have trouble with a spirituality which is "Sometimes you see him and sometimes you don't." But the possibility of seeing Christ in the world or in your life is much more problematic when you aren't with us. It is difficult to see if you aren't participating in the hospitality of the table where he can be made know to you in breaking bread.

I'll admit that I too have trouble with a "Sometimes you see him and sometimes you don't." This is the way it is with faith. There are so many distractions, so many reasons to doubt. But this story reminds me that it seeing is my issue, not Jesus. I may want to blame it on Him but that's not fair.

The Emmaus Road story tells that sometimes are my eyes are looking in the wrong places or my heart isn't burning with the Word or I'm not breaking bread at His table in a way that allows for the possibility that

I'm might catch a glimpse of my resurrected Savior. But I do know this. When I have those wonderful moments when Christ is revealed to me, I suddenly begin to see him many, many place. I see him staying with the homeless at the Wheeler Mission. I see him welcoming children almost every day the doors of this building is open. I see him at the bedside of a family who is saying goodbye to a loved one. I see him in your lives, expressing compassion and love to those you encounter each day.

When I have invited Jesus to "Stay with us," really invited him in, seriously studied His word, honestly broken his bread, my vision is much better and He can reveal himself to me anywhere.

The late Fred Craddock told a story about this, about how the risen Savior was revealed to him. Instead of it being dinner, it was breakfast. Craddock was stuck in Winnipeg, Canada and in the midst of an early October snow storm which paralyzed the city. Everything was shut down and his host could not even make it to Fred's hotel to pick him up for breakfast.

So, for breakfast, Fred found himself at a crowded bus depot café about two blocks from his hotel. As he entered, somebody scooted over and let him get in a booth. A big man with a greasy apron came over to the table and asked him what he wanted. Not knowing what the café served, Fred asked to see a menu.

"What'd ya want with a menu?" the man asked. "We have soup."  
"Then I'll have soup," he said. Just what he wanted--soup for breakfast.

The man brought the soup and Craddock says it was an unusual looking soup. It was grey, the color of a mouse. He did not know what was in it, but he took this spoon and tasted it. Awful! "I can't eat this," he said. So he sat in that crowded café warming his hands around the bowl, railing against the world, stuck in Winnipeg.

Then, the door opened and someone yelled, "Close the door," and she did. A woman came in. She was middle-aged, had on a coat, but no covering for her head. Someone scooted over and let her in a booth. The big man with the greasy apron came over and the whole café heard this conversation:

"What'd ya want?"

"Bring me a glass of water," she said.

The man brought the water, took out his tablet and repeated the question. "What'd ya want?"

"Just the water."

"Lady, you gotta order something."

"Just the water."

The man's voice started rising: "Lady, I've got paying customers here waiting for a place, now order!"

"Just the water."

"You order something or you get out!"

"Can I stay and get warm?"

"Order or get out."

So, she got up. The people at the table where she was seated got up, people around got up, the folks that let Fred sit at the table got up, Fred got up, and they all started moving towards the door. It was as if, someone said, "if she can't stay with us, none of us will stay."

"OK," the big man with the greasy apron said, "She can stay." And everybody sat down. He even brought her a bowl of that soup.

Fred asked the man sitting next to him, "Who is she?" "I never saw her before," he said, "but if she ain't welcome, ain't nobody welcome." Then Craddock said, all you could hear was the sound of people eating that soup. "Well, if they can eat it, I can eat it," he said.

He picked up his spoon and started eating the soup. "It was good soup. I ate all of that soup. It was strange soup. I don't remember ever having it. As I left I remembered eating something that tasted like that before. That soup that day tasted like bread and wine." <sup>2</sup>

It can happen. Eyes can be opened; hearts can burn within you. But you have to be willing to say, "Stay with us."

There is a little prayer that is meaningful to me. It comes from the Book of Common Prayer. You might like it; it might help you see:

"Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in scripture and the breaking of bread." Isn't that lovely?

Or if you like, simply pray, Lord Jesus, stay with us. It will be enough.

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<sup>1</sup> The Coincidences of the Emmaus Narrative of Luke and the Testimonium of Josephus  
Gary J. Goldberg, Ph.D., The Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha  
13 (1995) pp. 59-77

<sup>2</sup> Craddock Stories, Mike Graves and Richard Ward, eds., (St. Louis : Chalice Press, 2001)