This story happens around dinner time on the day the resurrection occurred.

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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, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But 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.

22Moreover, 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.
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.

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. 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?”

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

* These two disciples missed the resurrection. Can you imagine that? They were right there, maybe within a couple of hundred yards of the empty tomb, and they didn’t get it. They heard the stories from others, but they never saw the risen Christ. No angels, no Jesus with nail-scarred hands. Sounds a lot like us, doesn’t it? We weren’t there. We didn’t see him. We’ve heard the stories, but haven’t actually seen the risen Lord.

So, in a sense, we are all on the road to Emmaus. How do we encounter Christ? There doesn’t seem to be a formula. Even in Scripture, each person has a unique story. In the old days we called them “testimonies.” People tell how Christ came into their lives. “It was on a Tuesday…” Or, “I came to know Christ at a Young Life Camp, or in a bar, or in a Bible Study.” Everybody has a different testimony, a different story.

* One day my preaching professor in seminary was discussing the goal of preaching. What are we trying to do when we preach? What do we hope happens? Are we preaching to convert people to Christianity? Should we call for a decision each week…conclude with an “altar call?” If not, why not?

He told a story of two horses. Both were wild and needed to be broken. The first was placed in a stall while a rider mounted. The horse was then released into a fenced corral and ridden until he broke. The horse surrendered.

The second horse was allowed to roam within the fence. Each day a person came to the fence with a sugar cube out-stretched in their hand. They returned every day
until the horse finally came over and skittishly took the cube from their hand. This went on for several days.

Then one day, this person entered the corral and over time was allowed to approach the horse and eventually placed a blanket on its back, then a saddle, and without any fanfare, mounted the horse. The horse surrendered.

So, then Dr. Bergland asked, “Which of the two horses was the most broken?” (We were Duke students, so we had this!). They were equally broken, or tamed. Correct!

The moral to the story is also obvious. People come to Christ in different ways. Some have dramatic experiences; others never knew a time they weren’t Christians. But the common thread is a relationship with Christ.

* But we never see this Christ. How do you have a relationship with someone you never see? Have you ever seen love? No, but you have seen the effects of it. Have you ever seen the wind? No, only the effects; rustling grass, the sway of the trees, high seas, the motion of a kite, but you have never actually seen the wind.

Our relationship with the risen Christ is through the Holy Spirit. They are one and the same. We’ve never seen either one, but we have seen the effects. But how do you really know it is the Holy Spirit, and not just your own idea or thoughts? That’s the Million Dollar Question.

How did they know that it was the risen Christ sitting with them at dinner? Their eyes were opened! Their hearts burned within them. They recognized him. These are not just our own thoughts. Something happens to us, beyond us, almost in spite of us. It doesn’t rationally make any sense, but then again, most incredible things in life don’t make sense! They’re beyond explanation.

* Jesus intentionally left Jerusalem and showed up to two confused and disappointed disciples, 7 miles away, on the road to Emmaus. They didn’t ask him to come. They didn’t pray hard enough to get him there. They didn’t even really believe anything that caused this to happen. God opened their eyes. God enflamed their hearts. God revealed the truth to them.

We need this experience just as badly as they did. The Church needs this experience. Our modern world needs the experience of divine revelation. There are millions of people walking on the road to Emmaus today. They missed the resurrection. They don’t get it. They need an encounter with the risen Lord. We all do.

Without it, we are left with a powerless religion, a story that belongs to somebody else, and hearts that are yet to burn with the compassion and love of Christ. We go home empty.
Yet, this story says God does show up in the remote places of our lives. God shows up in our confusion and disappointments. God shows up where people don’t get it, where eyes are closed and hearts are cold. So, it is reasonable to expect that God shows up here, on our Road to Emmaus.

We can’t make that happen. We can only be receptive to it when it does!

* Come Lord Jesus, be honored at this Table. Open our eyes and hearts to your holy presence in our midst. Amen.