

SEQUOYAH HILLS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Walking Witnesses: Remember Table Talk”**

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**Luke 24: 28-35**

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Over the last few Sundays, we have been reading resurrection stories from the end of Luke. Last week Pastor Jay shared with us that one of the ways that we recognize Jesus, and hopefully, people recognize Jesus in us, is through scripture. Jay reminded us that many times, we are the only scripture people will ever experience. There are many ways to be witnesses to the Risen Christ, and ways to recognize who Jesus is. This morning we will be looking at part of what has become known as the Walk to Emmaus by two of his disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple. It takes place the same day as the resurrection, but no one has seen the Risen Christ. The women have gone to the tomb that was empty and were told by angels to remember what Jesus had said, that he would be crucified, but then would rise again on the third day. And they did remember Jesus' words and went and told the disciples. Peter went but only saw the grave cloths there, but Jesus was not there. While these two disciples in our story today, were on the road, going to Emmaus they had, like all of us have done before after a traumatic event, been discussing all that had happened to this friend, who had been put to death, they were processing, trying to understand everything. Jesus joins them on the road, but for some reason, they don't recognize him. But as Pastor Jay pointed out last week, he began to witness to them, after they had been witnessing to him about the events. The Risen Christ pointed to scripture to help them understand what had happened but there was still no recognition. And that is where our scripture for this week begins.

*<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us<sup>[a]</sup> while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” <sup>33</sup> That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup> They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup> Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

**Luke 24:28-35**

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me? Lord, open our eyes, our ears, our hearts to what you would have us hear – not because of anything your servant might say, but because of what you say to us this morning.

I was very fortunate and blessed to be raised in a family that insisted on the family sitting down at table to eat together. I didn't always appreciate this fact, but as I look back it was an important part of my life. It was where we learned who we were as a family, as a unit, but it was also where we learned who we were individually in that family. It was where we shared stories about our day, where we talked about what was happening the next day, as we got older, where we talked about what was going on in the world. And our father was a minister, so especially as we got older, there were even theological discussions around the table. And because our table was a gate leg table, even when we had guests there was always room for one more. It sounds kind of idyllic, but believe me, there were also arguments and eye rolls along the way. But it helped us know who we were. It was, for the most part, a safe place, where we felt love. And one of the ways, that helped us know who we were, and whose we were, was that every night as we sat down, we would automatically reach out and hold hands and someone would say the blessing. No matter what happened afterward, that always happened first. Especially, at the end of a long day, it was important for us to remember that God had provided for us, and I would say, set the tone that God was with us, even as we ate, and would be with us throughout the day and night.

That's an important thing to remember. Maybe that is why I love this story so much. I love the fact that Jesus came along side of these two disciples, in their deep sadness, their confusion, their fear, and witnessed to them. He wanted them to recognize him, to let them know he was still with them – even if, as Shawn Wallace in *The Princess Bride*, said repeatedly, “Inconceivable!” It must have been inconceivable that this man, their leader, their friend who had died so traumatically could be alive and present with them. But, you see, the promise that scriptures had made clear throughout the generations, “I will be with you, do not be afraid,” the salvation oracle, was being fulfilled as they walked, and talked and as they sat, and ate.

As someone who loves food, I am so glad that one of the things that helps us recognize God's presence among us, comes from food and from meals. They can be so transformative, and can help us remember God's comfort. I heard a story a few weeks ago that shows the power of food. The story is told by Lee Cowan, on CBS, Sunday Morning. It is about two men – one, a young Israeli chef, Alon Shaya, and the other an elderly gentleman who is a Holocaust survivor. Alon has a restaurant in New Orleans, but immigrated to the United States when he was just a young boy. He said as a child, he wanted to forget about his roots. He said while all of the other children were eating their tater tots and chicken nuggets for lunch, he was eating falafel. So, when he decided to go to culinary school as an adult he focused on Italian cuisine. But then after visiting Israel several years later, “the dishes of his youth whispered anew.” He began cooking the Israeli and middle Eastern dishes of his roots and serves them at his restaurant and it has helped remind him of who he is.

It also led him to The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as he was learning more about Jewish history and his roots. In particular, he became interested in cookbooks of family recipes of those who suffered the Holocaust. Which brings us to the other man in our story, the Holocaust survivor. Alon had found and shared being so amazed that people, during the Holocaust, would

write down family recipes, “not to cook but to remember.” Not to cook, but to remember. One of those cookbooks had survived and was in the museum. Alon was able to meet the second man in our story Stephen Fenves. His mother had written down the recipes during those dark days when the Nazi’s had moved them all into the ghettos. Alon had been amazed that people would take the time and energy to write down the recipes during such a dark time. But you see, Stephen explained, that it was a way for them to remember the good things even amid such pain, even when they were being treated as less than human. Alon was able to take that recipe book and prepare those dishes from the recipes for Stephen. After 70 years, for Stephen, it helped him remember who he was. He had been in such pain for so long due to the trauma, that he had forgotten how to feel. But the dishes reminded him who he was and brought back the good feelings of his youth before everything good had been stripped away. He became reconnected, which had seemed impossible to even fathom. Something that before seemed inconceivable was brought back by food. It is amazing how much power food has. I wonder if the concept of eating with this stranger the two disciples had met on the road, is also what reconnected them to something as inconceivable as Jesus’ presence among them. But maybe it wasn’t just eating. . . . maybe it was the actions this stranger did when they sat down to eat . . .

We not only bear witness to and recognize the Risen Christ through a meal, but also through actions. Did you notice what Jesus did just prior to the disciples recognizing him? “He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.” (Luke 24:30) Does that sound familiar? The very action Jesus took and the words he said during the Passover meal in that upper room just a few days earlier, the very words that are said in our Words of Institution, “Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19) Remembrance . . . remembrance . . . And in a story a few chapters back from our scripture today, when Jesus feeds the multitude, who were hungry, he did much the same thing. The words are also found in Luke 9:16-17. “And taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.” God’s presence is and always has been constant, when people are enslaved, when people need to be taught who and whose they are, when people are scared or confused or experiencing grief. What brings back our memory, what brings us hope, and reminds us of faith is feasting on that richness and powerful presence that makes our hearts burn.

Praise God, that we are witnesses to these things, so that we can let others know of that power that is stronger than any hunger, any fears, any confusion that we or they might have. We are witnesses, just as the disciples were witnesses of the Risen Christ. The disciples went back, remember? In vs.33 it tells us, they bore witness to the rest of the disciples, even in their grief, to make sure they heard the powerful news, too. To confirm the experience of the Risen Christ. God is with us, in bread and wine, in lifting that bread and wine and giving thanks for presence, and actions that give – that distribute hope and love to help all in the world and help us all remember.

In the name of the Creator, the Risen Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.