

The *First Meal* of the *New* Creation  
Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022  
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We began our Easter celebration where the story always begins — at the empty tomb. Though each of the gospels contains different details in retelling the story of how the disciples discovered that the tomb was empty, all of these eyewitness accounts end on the same note — disbelief. The disciples failing to trust what they saw with their own eyes and what they heard with their own ears.

As Luke reported, the women after discovering the tomb empty do as the angel told them to do they — told the Eleven and all the others. Notice, Luke makes a point of saying the “Eleven,” emphasizing the break in the intimate communion they had shared at the Last Supper that was severed by Judas’ betrayal. When the women tell the Eleven and all the unidentified others the good news they had received — that Jesus is risen — their words are dismissed as nonsense. Peter runs to see for himself that the tomb is empty, yet he goes home “wondering what happened?” The empty tomb isn’t the sign of the resurrection.

So, the disciples remain in fear, locked behind closed doors in the upper room while all the others return to their homes, also wondering what happened. Not just what happened to Jesus’ body, but how could they begin to comprehend the events that had happened in the past few days, from the high of a hero’s welcome to the agony of the cross. Their hearts filled with grief over the death of their beloved teacher and friend. How would they now live without him? How will they now live with their own guilt that they didn’t remain faithful to him all the way to the end? Ashamed that only his mother, a couple of women, and his best friend, John, stayed by his side as he was tortured, humiliated, and crucified.

Two of them begin the journey home processing it all aloud as they walk. As we know, when it comes to storytelling in the gospels, there are no minor details. Those facts that were ultimately recorded for posterity bear the weight of revelation! Luke tells us these two followers of Jesus were going *to* Emmaus. That little word — “to” — means they were walking away from Jerusalem. Luke also tells us that the Sabbath was over. As Emmaus is west of Jerusalem, these two followers of Jesus were walking away from Jerusalem into the setting sun, the light of day fading into the darkness of night. It’s such a vivid image of the condition of their hearts as they left the City of God behind them; the place where God would restore the throne of David and the kingdom of Israel. Broken-hearted and despairing in spirit, they were walking away from the city of hope and promise.

Without warning, and seemingly from out of thin air, a stranger is walking beside them. He wants to know what they are talking about, catching them off guard. They can’t imagine how anyone who had been in Jerusalem had not heard that the Romans had unjustly convicted an innocent rabbi of treason and crucified him alongside two common thieves. But, the man appeared sincere in his ignorance, and so they tell him, and out pours a tale of shattered hopes and disappointed expectations. This man Jesus, who they knew to be a great prophet who had healed the sick, welcomed the outcast, who had forgiven sinners, and taught the Word of God. This man Jesus, they “had hoped” was more than a prophet mighty in word and deed but

apparently, he wasn't. They "had hoped" that he was the promised Messiah, but apparently, they were mistaken. "They had hoped" — words of disappointment, discouragement, and despair. All their hopes and dreams shattered, they decided to go home to life as it had been before they left everything behind to follow this promising young man.

We can all picture it. Their heads down, eyes fixed on the road beneath their feet as the increasing darkness makes it harder to see the way ahead, and then comes the encounter. Jesus walks alongside them, hears the hopelessness in their voices, and asks them a question — "Have you not been paying attention to what God has tried to reveal to you since the time of Moses until now?"

We might imagine them staring at Jesus with a sort of "what do you mean?" look on their faces. And, so, Jesus tells them God's story — a story of God's persistent and passionate desire to be in a loving, covenantal partnership with all God's people. How God sent prophet after prophet to call God's beloved children into that relationship. For seven miles, this strange teacher seemed to know more than they knew about the coming of the Messiah, so when they arrive home wanting to hear more, they invite him into their home.

In a rather audacious gesture, the stranger places himself as host at the table and then, assuming the host's honor, he offers the blessing over the bread, leaving everyone mystified until he breaks the bread. Now they remember! They've seen those hands bless and break bread before, that day on the hillside when 5,000 people were fed. Suddenly, their eyes "were opened." The phrase literally describes how the firstborn child opens the womb. Their sudden realization that the Risen Lord was standing before them was the dawning of the new creation that will come as the resurrection power of God is unleashed upon the world by those who receive it. They asked themselves, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" No, because their hearts were filled with discouragement, hopelessness, sorrow, grief, and despair. Jesus' words were not enough. They desperately needed a sign that he had risen, indeed!

The empty tomb was not the sign of resurrection. The breaking of the bread and the word proclaimed are signs of the resurrection. From that moment on, Jesus will be present among them as they remember and proclaim the Word and whenever they break bread at table together with him as Host — from that day of resurrection, until this Easter day. Jesus appears whenever, wherever, and however he is wanting to encounter us, but always when we keep the feast of new life with him. Not just when we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, but daily when we keep the feast of new life with him in our hearts.

Filled to overflowing with resurrection hope those witnesses to the resurrection immediately ran seven miles back to Jerusalem because they couldn't wait to tell the disciples, "Jesus is risen, he is risen indeed!" Good news we, too, have to share because of our own times, when the light of life has faded into the darkness of grief, sorrow, and despair, and we are desperately in need of hope and promise, and our Risen Lord has drawn near to us when, how, and where we have least expected him to appear. And, we again experience the resurrection power of our Savior, who came that we might have life and the fullness of joy.