

WEEK 6: SERVICE RESOURCES

THEME: ROAD TO EMMAUS

MAIN READING: Luke 24.13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priest and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

SECOND READING if needed: Revelation 22.12-14,16-17

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

PRAYER OF APPROACH

God of Wonder and of unexpected delight -- as we celebrate Christ's risen presence among us today we pray that you would open to us the scripture's message. Talk to us as we journey along life's way, meet us as we fellowship with one another, and so move in us that we may claim all your promises as our own. Open our eyes and quicken our hearts, we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen

PENITENCE

O Risen Christ, As You walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Open our eyes to Your presence In the midst of our journey.

We confess, O Lord, That like those disciples, Our hearts are often weighed down with doubt and despair. Forgive us, we pray, For not recognizing You in our daily walk, For the moments we have failed to see You in the faces of others, And for the times we have let fear and uncertainty cloud our faith.

O Merciful Savior, Kindle within us the fire of Your love, That our hearts may burn brightly with the light of Your truth. Help us to listen with renewed clarity to Your words, That we might find courage and hope in the stories of Your grace.

Lead us, O Shepherd, From the shadows of our sins Into the brightness of Your redemption. Guide us back to the path of righteousness, That we may walk humbly with You, Our hearts burning with the joy of Your presence. In Your holy name, we pray.

Amen.

DECLARATION FAITH

**We believe in the risen Lord,
who walks beside us on the journey of life.
With hearts ignited by His presence,
We proclaim our faith in His everlasting love.**

**In moments of doubt and despair,
We trust in His guidance and grace.
Our eyes are opened to His truth,
As we break bread in communion with Him.**

**We affirm that in every step we take,
Jesus, our Savior, is with us.
His words burn within us,
Igniting hope, faith, and redemption.
Amen.**

INTERCESSIONS

O God, we pray that we may never forsake the means of grace that you have granted to us -- keep us true to the way of prayer - to the reading of scripture - and to the practice of gathering in your name and of welcoming both friends and strangers into our homes and our hearts. We pray that as Christ appeared on the road to Emmaus o he might appear to us - and through us to others -- as we share the joys and concerns we have, as we hear and speak your word, as we break bread and pray together.

Lord in your mercy
hear our prayer....

Lord, today we pray for those in our church and our community who are troubled and upset as were the disciples on the first Easter Day. We hold before you those who experiencing the grief of losing that which is important to them - that which has helped shape their lives - be it a job, a home, a way of life, or a loved one. Grant that they may encounter the Risen Christ and know that the future is safe in his hands...

Lord in your mercy
hear our prayer....

Lord, we pray for those who reach out in our church and our community to minister to others your healing presence. We pray for those who listen -- for those who counsel - for those who share your word -- for all those who break bread with us and give you thanks. Bless them in their love that they may ever more fully experience the love that they share.

Lord in your mercy
hear our prayer....

We ask all these things - and we give you our deepest and most profound thanks for being with us and listening to us and granting us peace - through Jesus Christ, our Risen Saviour - he who taught us to call upon you saying...
Our Father...

BENEDICTION

Go in peace
and may the Word of God stir your hearts and your minds,
may the love of Christ Jesus light your path each day,
and may the power of the Holy Spirit uphold you and give to you
every spiritual blessing
both now and forevermore.
Amen

WEEK 6: HYMNS & SONGS

- STF 30 Jesus, stand among us at the meeting of our lives
- STF 308 On the journey to Emmaus with our hearts cold as stone
- STF 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love
- STF 483 We are marching
- STF 573 Be known to us in breaking bread
- STF 576 Bread is blessed and broken
- STF 580 Come, Lord, be our guest
- STF 584 Food to pilgrims given, food upon the way
- STF 594 Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us
- STF 597 O thou who this mysterious bread did in Emmaus break
- STF 772 May the road rise up to meet you

God who knows our darkest moments
meets us in our brokenness:
walks beside us as a whisper,
holds our pain in his caress.
God, who leads through shadowed valleys,
where death's bleakness dims our sight,
speaks a peace beyond our knowing,
floods our anguish with his light.

Far beyond our grief's horizon,
as Creation holds its breath:
Love Divine, revealed in Jesus,
tears apart the chains of death.
Servant son and humble healer,
by your cross and life laid down
you have carried all our suffering
and you wear the victor's crown.

Lift us up, now, risen Saviour
to the place where mercy plays,
where our broken hopes and heartache
find their healing in your gaze.
This is love, that God has saved us!
This is love, that Christ has died!
We rejoice that love has conquered
and has drawn us to your side.

Tune: any 8,7,8,7 D tune
Copyright 2016 © Gareth Hill Publishing/
Song Solutions
CCLI song number is 7069447

WEEK 6: REFLECTION

Rarely does the gospel offer a neat answer shrouded in certainty. Instead, it often presents something far more precious: questions that awaken the soul, narratives that mirror our lives, and sacred spaces for contemplation.

The narrative of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is no exception. It doesn't dictate what to believe or prescribe what to do; rather, it unfolds like a map, not with explicit directions, but with landmarks that assist us in orienting ourselves amidst life's complexities.

It's a tale of shattering and restoration, leaving and returning, blindness and recognition.

If your life has ever been shattered, this is your story. If your life has ever been pieced back together, this is your story. And if you're lingering in that in-between space—not fully broken, not yet restored—this is your story, too.

The Journey Begins: Leaving Jerusalem

Think about Cleopas and his companion walking away from Jerusalem on Easter morning. Their hearts were heavy, their hopes dashed. Jerusalem had been the epicentre of their faith, their dreams, and ultimately, their deepest disappointment.

Have you ever felt like that?

Did you need to escape because life had given you more than you could carry? Maybe you've been weighed down by grief, disillusionment, or unanswered prayers. Maybe, like them, you've walked away from something that once felt full of promise.

Jerusalem signifies those places in our lives where expectations remain unfulfilled, where dreams fade, and where sorrow infiltrates like an unwelcome guest. It's where life doesn't unfold as planned, even when we've done everything "right."

It is where we mourn—for lost loved ones, lost identities, or futures that never materialised. Cleopas and his companion were not merely departing a city; they were escaping the wreckage of their hearts.

But the gospel doesn't leave us there.

As they walked, they talked. Not just casual conversation but deep, raw processing of all that had happened—Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, death, and the confusing rumours of an empty tomb. They were trying to make sense of the senseless, as we often do when life blindsides us.

And then Jesus shows up. But here's the twist: they don't recognise Him. How often do we fail to recognise the sacred in our own lives? How often does grace walk beside us, unnoticed, while we're lost in grief or distraction? Jesus listens, not interrupting their pain with quick fixes or platitudes. He simply walks with them, asking questions and inviting them to voice their sorrow.

This is where the story speaks volumes. The journey to Emmaus isn't about escaping life but walking through it. It's about how, even in our unawareness, Christ meets us on the road—in our questions, heartache, and conversations.

Eventually, they reach Emmaus. We don't know why they chose this village; maybe it didn't matter. Sometimes, anywhere feels better than the place of our pain. But Emmaus isn't just an escape; it becomes the site of their awakening.

They invite Jesus to stay, moved by something they can't quite name. The simple, sacred act of breaking bread opens their eyes. They recognise Him—not in grand miracles or dramatic revelations but in the ordinary, in the familiar ritual of sharing a meal.

When Jesus breaks the bread, something in them breaks open, too. Their grief cracks just enough to let light in. And isn't that how it happens for us? Sometimes, our restoration doesn't come in sweeping gestures but in quiet moments: a shared meal, a kind word, a fleeting sense of peace amidst the storm.

Jesus wasn't just giving them bread; He was giving them back themselves. In that breaking, they found wholeness. And as quickly as He appeared, He vanished—not because He left them, but because now He was within them. His presence had moved from external to internal, from beside them to burning within their hearts.

The Return: Back to Jerusalem

"That same hour, they got up and returned to Jerusalem." Notice the shift. The place they had fled in despair is now the place they rush back to with joy. Jerusalem hasn't changed, but they have. It's no longer just a place of death and disappointment; it's now the site of resurrection and new beginnings.

They return not to the same Jerusalem but with new eyes to see it differently. Our lives often follow this pattern: shattered lives, broken bread, restored hearts. We leave places of pain only to find that our journey leads us back—not to the same circumstances, but to ourselves, transformed.

Reflecting on Our Own Journeys

The road to Emmaus isn't a one-time journey. It's a path we walk again and again throughout our lives. The pattern is simple yet profound: Jerusalem (loss), Emmaus (encounter), Jerusalem (renewal). But living it is anything but simple. It's messy and painful and requires deep trust—trust that the shattered pieces of our lives can become the mosaic of something beautiful.

So, where are you on the road today? Are you leaving Jerusalem, attempting to escape heartbreak? Are you walking with questions, unaware of the sacred presence beside you? Are you at Emmaus, yearning for recognition, for that moment when your heart burns with clarity? Or are you on your way back to Jerusalem, renewed in ways you never anticipated?

Here are some questions to sit with:

- In what ways has your life been shattered? How have you experienced restoration?
- What are you running from? What are you running toward?
- What is your deepest hunger right now?
- Where is your Jerusalem? Where is your Emmaus?
- What in your life is being broken open today?

There are no right or wrong answers. Only your honest answers mark the sacred intersections of your life and Jesus' presence.

The beauty of this story lies in the fact that Jesus was there all along—in Jerusalem before they departed, on the road to Emmaus, in the breaking of the bread, and back in Jerusalem upon their return. His presence was not dependent on their recognition of Him.

It is the same for us. Whether we see Him or not, whether we feel His presence or doubt it, He is there—walking beside us, sharing bread with us, and igniting our hearts.

These intersections are referred to as the gifts of God for the people of God.

They are the grace notes woven into the symphony of our lives, whispering, *"You are not alone."*

Lord, you meet us on every road—whether we are walking away in sorrow or returning in joy. Open our eyes to recognise You in the breaking of the bread, in the quiet moments, and in the hearts that burn within us.

When our lives feel shattered, remind us that You are present in the pieces, gently restoring us with grace.

Give us the courage to face our Jerusalems, the faith to walk our Emmaus roads, and the hope to return transformed.

Thank You for never leaving us, for being the light in our darkness, and the love that binds us together.

Amen.

Sermons in Art #6



Caravaggio: Supper at Emmaus

It's the evening of the first Easter Day.

Two of Jesus' followers are walking along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It's a distance of about seven miles—perhaps a two-hour walk. What is going through their heads?

Maybe these two grief-stricken followers wanted to just get away for a while. Think about what it must have been like for them to lose hope. The one in whom they'd invested all their hope was gone! Suddenly a third figure comes alongside and falls into step with them. He asks

Are you the only one who does not know...?'

The one asking the question is the only person who knows the answer—but the two disciples have no idea with whom they speak.

As you read this story with the benefit of hindsight, I'm sure the biggest question on your mind is this: **How did those disciples not recognise Jesus?**

These were followers of Jesus. They knew him. They had been with him. But they didn't recognise him even though they were looking straight at him. How is this possible?

When we moved to our new home 3 years ago, we met an elderly couple who live opposite. She is a curious and busily active woman who likes to know everyone's business. He is a bluff rough diamond; a retired builder is more at home shovelling cement into a wheelbarrow. He looked like he'd studiously avoided the barbers for many years—long hair was barely kept in place with an ever-present flat cap and a full beard.

A few weeks ago, he fell ill and had a spell in hospital. When he returned, he'd obviously been prevailed upon to attend to his appearance—he was shorn of his flowing locks and clean-shaven.

In all honesty, I didn't recognise him.

I thought for a brief, fleeting moment that the woman had bumped him off and got herself a new bloke! But, no, it was the same guy—he looked completely different.

I think something of that elusive quality is captured in this painting from 1601 by the Italian master Caravaggio. It hangs in the National Gallery in London—one of my favourite places to visit whenever I'm in London.

It is a powerful, even overwhelming painting, measuring just under two metres wide and one and a half metres deep. It captures the moment when the two Emmaus Road disciples suddenly realise who Jesus is.

Unusually in this painting, we see Jesus portrayed as beardless. It's not the only Renaissance painting with a clean-shaven Jesus. But it is infrequent.

Why does Caravaggio break with the common tradition of the time? Is Caravaggio perhaps trying to show that Jesus—crucified, resurrected but not-yet-Ascended—was somehow different? Could that be one reason why the two disciples failed to recognise him on the road?

At the end of Mark's Gospel are a few verses which don't appear in the earliest manuscripts. Most ancient manuscripts end at verse 8, but some extra verses often appear in footnotes in modern bible translations.

If we look at these verses, we see an interesting snippet.

*After these things, he was revealed in **another form** to two of them as they walked on their way into the country* (Mark 16.12, emphasis mine). It's hard to know for sure why the disciples failed to recognise Jesus.

Was there something different about his appearance? Caravaggio may be hinting at that by painting Jesus clean-shaven. Were they so downcast that they could not countenance the idea of Jesus being there? Or was there some supernatural 'shielding' of Jesus from their eyes? We don't know. But it's a reminder that much about Jesus is not as clear and easily observed as some suggest.

How often we fail to see what is right there in front of us—and yet we often leap to conclusions and certainty about Jesus. And just as there is a mysterious and elusive quality about Jesus in this story, perhaps we should reflect on how much we fail to understand about Jesus.

The theme of Jesus' self-revelation continues as we look at this painting. On the right of the scene, we see a figure with an older, careworn face and modest clothing, suggesting a working man. He wears a scallop shell on his clothing—the traditional symbol for St James, a fisherman and disciple of Jesus.

Could this be James? We cannot know for sure...What we can be sure of is his astonished reaction! He flings out his arms in a gesture reminiscent of how Christ met his death. His left arm appears to be reaching out to us—as if to pull us into the scene, drawing us in and including us in this moment of revelation.

This second disciple, again clothed with the traditional garb of the common labourer, rocks back in astonishment at recognising Jesus.

If the other man is James, this must be Cleopas (Luke 24.18).

His jacket strains at the seams—literally tearing apart—and his hands grip the chair in amazement and fear. It's almost as if the chair itself will fly off in the viewer's direction.

How often are we surprised by God? Is our faith predictable, even dull—or are we still captivated by a God who constantly shows up in ways we cannot predict?

If you are anything like me, those moments often come unexpectedly. And I often experience God away from the confines of the Church.

Sometimes in the least likely places. Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite friar, wrote about "practising the presence of God"—liberating our experience of God from the narrow confines of church or worship services—and finding him everywhere. His book, *Practising the Presence of God*, is still worth a read today if you stumble upon a copy in a second-hand bookshop.

The fourth—often overlooked figure—in the painting is the innkeeper. Notice the quizzical look on his face. He is serving a meal, a task he has done many times before.

To him, nothing out of the ordinary is happening—and his puzzled face contrasts the over-excited reactions of the two disciples. He gazes down on Jesus as if oblivious to who this man is—and his significance.

What do we miss that God is doing? None of us sees the totality of all God is doing in our lives and the world.

As St Paul wrote,

For now, we see in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13.12).

Caravaggio has neatly presented us—in these three down-to-earth people—with snapshots of how many of us experience God at different times.

There are occasions when we are literally “surprised by God”—those “wow” moments.

And there are also times when we are oblivious, too wrapped up in our daily tasks even to notice him.

Jesus raises a hand of blessing over the ordinary food of bread and wine, infusing it with meaning and power.

Is it this which causes the scales to fall from the eyes of the disciples?

It is undeniable that when Jesus takes, blesses and breaks bread, they recognise Him as their Lord.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him (Luke 24.30).

At that moment, Jesus disappears from their sight. And the disciples say to one another, *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”* (Luke 24:32)

It’s helpful to notice that whilst the disciples were initially unsure about the identity of their mysterious companion, they sensed something transformational.

Something burned deep within their hearts.

What burns in OUR hearts today? What are the deep longings in our souls?

What are the needs in the world or in our lives that set us aflame with holy passion?

Those of the questions we can ponder this week as we reflect on the story of the disciples meeting with Jesus—and how Caravaggio portrays their encounter over supper.

WEEK 6: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Nature Walks: Encountering God in Creation

In the busyness of life, it's easy to overlook the divine whispers interwoven into the world around us.

We rush from one task to another, heads down, minds cluttered with worries and distractions.

Yet, God's presence is not confined to church buildings or moments of structured prayer.

He reveals Himself in the quiet majesty of the natural world, speaking through the rustling leaves, the soaring birds, and the gentle rhythm of the waves.

A simple nature walk can transform into a sacred practice—an opportunity to slow down, be present, and encounter God in creation.

As we step outside and attune our hearts to the beauty around us, we start to recognise how the natural world mirrors its Creator.

Walking with Awareness

The next time you go for a walk, whether in a park, a forest, or just around your neighbourhood, take a moment to set an intention.

Instead of walking to reach a destination, walk to observe.

Pay attention to the details—the texture of the bark on the trees, the colours of the flowers, the sound of the wind weaving through the branches.

Each element of creation offers a glimpse of God's artistry and presence.

Jesus often retreated to nature for solitude and prayer.

In Matthew 14:23, we observe that after feeding the five thousand, *"He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray."*

If the Son of God sought communion with the Father through nature, how much more ought we?

Seeing God in the Details

Nature is filled with divine fingerprints, each part of creation revealing something about the Creator:

- *The Sky* – Ever-changing and vast, the sky reminds us of God's infinite nature. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands"* (Psalm 19:1)
- *The Trees* – Standing firm and rooted, trees symbolise spiritual growth and endurance. Just as trees draw nourishment from their roots, we must be deeply rooted in faith to withstand life's storms.
- *The Birds* – They neither sow nor reap, yet God provides for them (Matthew 6:26). They remind us to trust in God's provision and care.
- *The Flowers* – Each delicate bloom stands as a testament to God's creativity and attention to detail. They invite us to embrace the beauty and ephemeral nature of life, cherishing every moment.

Every leaf, every ripple on the water, every breeze carries a message: God is here. His presence fills the earth, and He invites us to notice Him.

A Time for Reflection

As you walk, consider: *How does this reveal God's presence?* What might He be showing you through the sights and sounds surrounding you? Perhaps the steady flow of a river reminds you of His constant guidance. Maybe the warmth of the sun on your face serves as a reminder of His love shining upon you.

Take a few deep breaths. Feel grateful for the beauty around you. In the stillness, speak to God. No elaborate prayers are necessary—just an open heart willing to listen and receive.

Bringing It into Daily Life

You don't have to escape to the mountains or the sea to experience God in nature. Even a brief stroll in your garden or a quiet moment by an open window can become a sacred pause.

The key is intention—choosing to see the natural world as a reflection of God's presence rather than merely scenery.

Consider incorporating nature walks into your regular spiritual practice. Stroll slowly, breathe deeply, and allow creation to guide you back to the Creator.

God's presence is not distant; it is as close as the wind against your face, the song of a bird, the rustling of leaves. Step outside, look around, and listen—He is waiting to be discovered in the beauty of His creation.

WEEK 6: WRITING PROMPTS

1. The Shattered and the Restored:

Reflect on a time in your life when you experienced deep disappointment or loss. How did that moment change you? In what ways did you find restoration, and what unexpected places or moments helped piece you back together?

2. The Road We Walk:

In the story of Cleopas and his companion, they walked away from Jerusalem in sorrow, but their journey brought them to a place of transformation. Write about a time you felt compelled to "leave" something or someone. What were you running from, and what did you discover along the way?

3. The Sacred in the Ordinary:

Jesus revealed Himself to Cleopas and his companion not through grand miracles but through the simple act of breaking bread. Explore the idea of finding the sacred in ordinary moments—what are some "small" experiences in your life that have brought you a sense of peace or clarity?

4. Running Towards What?: The return to Jerusalem marks a transformation. What does "returning to Jerusalem" look like in your life? Is there something you've left behind in disappointment or grief that you're now ready to approach with new eyes? What new perspectives or insights have you gained?

5. The Gifts of God in the Journey:

The journey to Emmaus teaches us that Jesus is present, even when we don't recognise Him. Write about a time when you sensed divine presence or grace in a subtle way. How did it show up for you, and how did that moment impact your journey?

WEEK 6: SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

Here are six engaging and discussion-worthy questions based on Jesus' walk to Emmaus in Luke 24:

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to reveal Himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, rather than to a larger group?
2. In Luke 24:17, Jesus asks the disciples, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" What significance do you find in Jesus beginning the conversation with a question rather than an immediate revelation of His identity?
3. The disciples did not recognize Jesus until He broke the bread. What does this moment symbolize for you, and how can it relate to our recognition of Jesus in our daily lives?
4. Consider the disciples' change in mood from sadness to joy. How does this transformation reflect your own experiences of faith and understanding of God's presence?
5. How do you interpret the significance of the disciples urging Jesus to stay with them, and how can this invitation be applied to our spiritual practices today?
6. After recognizing Jesus, the disciples return to Jerusalem to share their experience. What does this action teach us about the importance of testimony and sharing our faith with others?

I hope these questions spark thoughtful and meaningful discussions in your study group. Is there a particular aspect of the story that resonates with you more?

As an added resource, the next page gives you 3 multiple choice questions to help your group dig into the passage. Simply copy the page and hand out to group members (provide pens if needed). Ask them to think about which answer best represents their view (they can also add their own answers). Split into pairs to discuss or have a feedback session (whichever works best for you)

Why do you think the two disciples failed to recognise Jesus?

- The sun was in their eyes?
- They were too grief stricken?
- Jesus looked different?
- God somehow kept it from them?
- They weren't looking?
- Something else

Why do you think that Jesus made out to go on further?

- He had somewhere else to be?
- He was testing them out?
- He didn't like the look of the inn?
- He wanted the two disciples to choose to go deeper?
- Something else

What do you think it means for their 'hearts to burn within them'?

- Joy at seeing Jesus risen?
- Indigestion from the food ?
- Relief that the rumour they'd heard about Jesus were true?
- Spiritual blessings from hearing the words of Jesus explained?
- Something else