

**Sunday, May 1, 2011**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

## **Sermon**

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The most famous line in the Road to Emmaus story is “Then their eyes were open and they recognized him.” The story is often boiled down to that one sound bite. But we lose much of the lesson if we only focus on the breaking of the bread. Let’s take a look at the journey itself and the parts of the story that are missing.

Cleopas and his unnamed companion are walking along the road. Now, Cleopas is not one of the disciples that we know by name, not one of the original twelve. However, from his account of what happened it sounds as if he was an insider.

He says, “Some women in our group astounded us...they were at the tomb early this morning and 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.”

So, perhaps our idea of only twelve disciples is misplaced. Perhaps the group of followers – those who knew and understood that Jesus was the messiah – is larger than we thought. It is important to remember that those who are unnamed are no less important than those in the spotlight.

We meet Cleopas and his unnamed companion as they are leaving Jerusalem for the seven-mile walk home to Emmaus. They are disappointed that the person they believed to be the Messiah is now dead. They are saddened that their world, which they thought would be radically changed, is in fact, unchanged. They are wallowing in their own grief and sorrow and suddenly Jesus is walking with them.

I wonder if they were surprised by the sudden appearance of another person, especially when they are hurrying away from the tension and potential violence in Jerusalem.

The story makes it seem as if Jesus just fell right in step along side of them. Jesus listens with compassion as Cleopas and his companion recount the events of the past week but then he seems to rebuke them when he says, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Jesus is redirecting their attention away from their own experience and toward the fulfillment of the scriptures. How often we become self-focused during a crisis, as if everything that happened happened just to us.

The travelers don’t respond, as far as we know, and Jesus launches into what must have been a lengthy discourse on the message of scripture. I wonder what these gentlemen are thinking now. This seems like an unusual encounter, yet they still are unaware that the Son of God is walking along with them.

By this time you would think that these two disciples would have at least noticed that this traveler looked something like their teacher but scripture says they were kept from recognizing him. If they had realized right from the start that it was Jesus, they would have lost the opportunity to learn all that he had to offer.

Sometimes, when we are certain that we already know everything, we don't give ourselves the chance to hear another side or perspective. By not knowing who Jesus was, the two disciples were able to hear all that he had to say. Just as Jesus had listened to their complete story, so they listened to him.

When they get to the village, scripture tells us that Jesus walked on ahead as if to keep going. The travelers called him back and invited him to stay. Hospitality is one of our primary Christian values – welcoming the stranger, no matter whom, no matter where. But where are they inviting Jesus to stay?

Again, we are not told the details – perhaps they are at the home of one of them, though I always picture this next scene in a public gathering place. So now, they all sit down to eat and Jesus takes the bread and blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. And then their eyes were open. **Then...** it took long enough. Just when they finally get it, Jesus disappears from their sight. Their response: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?” I have to think they might have said a bit more than that.

What a story!

Put yourself in the shoes of Cleopas. Walk that road and realize that Jesus, our resurrected savior, can show up at any moment. At any time in your life, in the most unexpected places, in ways unimagined – there he is – walking along side of you. If you listen to what he tells you – your heart will burn inside of you. You will gain insight and understanding of the meaning of scripture in your life.

When you gather at the communion table, you will have the opportunity to recognize Christ among us. These are the fundamental beliefs of our faith. We have built our traditions and our worship on these precepts. We are travelers on the road to Emmaus.

We gather in this meetinghouse to create an opportunity to recognize Jesus among us. We are a community rooted in the belief that the risen Christ is at work in our lives. Today we will gather at the communion table as an act of worship.

The United Church of Christ recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. Sacraments are ritual actions in worship, which, according to Scripture, were instituted by Jesus. In the sacraments of baptism and communion we ask the Holy Spirit to use water, bread, and wine to make visible the grace, forgiveness, and presence of God in Christ.

The communion meal recalls the table fellowship Jesus shared with his disciples, and in particular the Last Supper on the night before his death as well as this appearance to the disciples in Emmaus.

In the sacrament of Holy Communion, also called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, meaning "thanksgiving," Christians hear, taste, touch and receive the grace of God revealed through Jesus Christ in a unique way.

Communion is:

a joyous act of thanksgiving for all God has done, is doing, and will do for the redeeming of creation;

Communion is:

a sacred memorial of the crucified and risen Christ, a living and effective sign of Christ's sacrifice in which Christ is truly and rightly present to those who eat and drink;

Communion is:

an earnest prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit to unite those who partake with the Risen Christ and with each other, and to restore creation, making all things new;

Communion is:

an intimate experience of fellowship in which the whole church in every time and place is present and divisions are overcome;

Communion is:

a hopeful sign of the promised Realm of God marked by justice, love and peace.

The sacraments of baptism and communion are noted in the preamble to our constitution of the United Church of Christ. The preamble provides in one short paragraph, a description of our shared faith. It says that the church, our church, acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior.

Our church acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. Our church looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper our creative and redemptive work in the world. Our church claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. Our church affirms our responsibility in each generation to make this faith our own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.

Ours is a complex faith.

Much of what we believe is attributed to mystery. Each one of us walks our own Emmaus Road. Each one of us is a candidate for an encounter with the resurrected Christ.

We come together, sharing one belief, but interpreting that belief in as many ways as there are people here. We bring our gifts and talents to this body, knowing that collectively we might understand what individually might remain a mystery. It is in dialogue with our neighbor that we recognize our hearts burning within us as we grow in faith together.

Today, we will have two opportunities to actively engage in the life of our church. The first will be communion – which we will celebrate in just a few minutes. At the table, we come together as one – as the body of Christ. We come with a sense of wonder and awe, with a sense of thanksgiving

for the many blessings in our lives. We also come with humility, recognizing that we are part of a larger whole and that our lives are interconnected in such a way that we are dependent on one another, just as we are dependent on God.

Our second gathering as the Body of Christ will be our annual meeting, following worship today. In this venue we join our hearts and minds and work to discern what God is calling us to do as a church. In reporting on the activities of the various committees and electing people to leadership roles in the church, we again acknowledge our interdependence on one another and our dependence on God.

The church could not exist without people. Every act that is undertaken on behalf of the church community is an act of worship. Each task that you undertake to ensure that the church is strong is a prayer.

My friends, let us travel this road together – whether named or unnamed, following Paul’s counsel to the Phillipians:

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

Amen.