

It is a sad thing to hear someone say, “We had hoped...” It hurts. We’ve all felt the sting when hope implodes, when the future we thought was coming crashes and burns, and we are faced with an alternative reality that is grim and gloomy. “We had hoped...” These are the words of someone grieving and disappointed, of someone who expected God to act, of someone knocking on the door only to find God is not answering.

Emmaus, for these two disciples, is the road of disillusionment and disappointment. Luke gives us a glimpse into their utter despair as they leave Jerusalem, shaking their heads. And since we’ve all been there, walking in their proverbial sandals trying to shake off the pebbles of doubt that irritate the soles of our feet as well as our hearts, and knowing that there is a good chance that we, too, will someday have an Emmaus event, we are curious about what happens next.

What happens is that Jesus transforms their walk of disappointment into a hope-filled trek. The two disciples just don’t know it yet. People did a lot of walking in those days; it was the most common way to get around. Walking had nothing to do with physical fitness, but walking did have its benefits. A steady, walking pace gives one space for reflection, for prayer, and for realigning our perspectives. For Tom in “the Way,” walking allowed space to process his grief. There is something about the rhythm of putting one foot in front of the other that helps us carry deep sorrow better. The movement on the outside mirrors the movement on the inside. With each step, some of the weight begins to shift.

Tom also learned that walking opens us to grace. When we travel slowly, we notice things we would otherwise speed past: the kindness of a stranger, the beauty of a wildflower, or the quiet whisper of God. More than all this, pilgrimage-walking is a way of embodying longing. When we walk toward something sacred, we are saying with our bodies, “I don’t fully understand it yet, but I’m willing to go there, step by step.” Pilgrimage-walking is faith in motion, hope with blisters, and love stretched out over many miles.

But Cleopas and his friend do not know they are on a pilgrimage, and they certainly did not expect to encounter the Risen Christ on their walk. It’s probable that we, like them, don’t think of our days, years, or lives as a pilgrimage. We wake up, get dressed, go to work, make supper, do the laundry, care for the kids, and just live out another day with very little thought about how or where we might encounter Jesus. For Cleopas and his friend, there is simply a seven-mile walk home after the worst weekend of their lives.

As the two disciples walk and talk, a stranger joins them. Luke says, “Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:15-16).

It’s unbelievable! The risen Jesus, back from the dead, is walking right beside them, and they don’t even know it! The same thing happened to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning: she went to the tomb, found it empty, and spoke to Jesus assuming he was the gardener (John 20:14-15). Later, the disciples will go fishing in the Sea of Galilee and not recognize Jesus standing on the shore (John 21:4). Sadly, this is a very human flaw: we often fail to recognize Jesus when he shows up right in front of us.

I’ve often wondered why Jesus did not reveal himself to Cleopas and his companion right away. Maybe Jesus was hoping they would recognize him first. Or maybe it is because grace is often disguised and we cannot recognize grace until we travel alongside it for a while. We can be clueless as we walk “along life’s way.” We don’t have an instruction manual or map. We are often confused about roles and expectations. We muddle through midlife transitions. We are unaware that our values are misaligned with the core ethics we nominally confess. Then, when Jesus shows up, we are not necessarily in the right headspace or heart-space to recognize that we are in the presence of the Divine.

So, here is what Jesus does: First, he listens to Cleopas and his friend. He hears their frustration and disappointment. He takes note of their dashed hopes and skepticism that Jesus rose from the tomb. What a blessing to have a Savior who listens and hears our every word. Jesus doesn’t interrupt them or talk about himself; he simply lets them pour out their hearts: their confusion, dashed hopes, and profound grief. Jesus gives them the gift of being heard.

Honestly, being heard is just what most of us need. To have someone really listen, not just nod politely or wait their turn to speak, but to take our words seriously, hearing our complaints and our doubts. Jesus does that by letting the Emmaus disciples say everything that is on their minds, even when they get the story wrong and their perspective is clouded. Jesus listens patiently and compassionately. Jesus listens before he speaks: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (v. 27). This is the first Bible study ever.

This story should give us hope. Most of the time, we are not sitting on a mountaintop above the clouds in some kind of rarefied atmosphere, contemplating the meaning of life and taking in the breathtaking beauty that surrounds us. Our days are not generally filled with these mystical moments, but they are filled with ordinary walking: running errands, loading the dishwasher, taking the first grader to a ballet lesson or soccer practice, picking up after the dog, or buying a carton of milk. Like Cleopas and his friend, we’re not likely to expect Jesus to show up at the grocery store or the dry cleaners or the school parking lot;

but we learn in Luke 24 is that Jesus is walking along beside us, waiting with us, listening to us, loving us, and ready to teach us.

When the two disciples reach Emmaus, they urge their traveling companion to stay. “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over” (v. 29). Jesus goes in with them and breaks bread with them. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” (v. 30). This is Eucharistic language, the same pattern as the Last Supper. Something amazing happens in the breaking of bread: “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31). What is interesting about this is that when we ask Jesus to “stay with” us, he does. When we invite Jesus into our lives, he reveals himself to us. “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me” (Revelation 3:20).

In the case of Cleopas and his friend, there was another startling development. After the big reveal, stunned and trying to comprehend what just happened, they immediately make the reverse pilgrimage back to Jerusalem. Even though it was dark and dangerous, they raced out of their house in Emmaus and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the disciples and learned that they, too, had heard the rumors that Jesus had risen from the dead and that he intended to rendezvous with them in Galilee. Cleopas and his friend knew nothing about this, but they could confirm that Jesus was alive; and by making this confirmation, they became some of the earliest evangelists. When you meet Jesus, you just cannot wait to tell others about him.

The Emmaus story teaches us that God meets us in our disillusionment, that faith unfolds slowly, that hope is never dashed, and that the road becomes sacred when we walk it with Jesus. So, whether you are walking 500 miles through Spain or just treading the aisles at Walmart, let your walk be a prayer, let your road be a conversation, and let your steps open space for God’s grace. Jesus is likely to show up on roads we never expected.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us, too, we pray, in every part of our journey, no matter how full of doubt or fear we may be today. Through your Holy Spirit, we pray that you will open our eyes to see you as our risen Lord in all your beauty, and in all your loving power. Amen.

**Sources:**

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## Traveling Companion

Sunday, April 19, 2026

Luke 24:13-35

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

In the 2010 film, “The Way,” actor Martin Sheen plays Tom, a grieving father who travels to Spain following the death of his son, Daniel. Daniel was killed in a storm while hiking the famous Camino de Santiago, the “Way of St. James.” This 500-mile pilgrimage ends at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, where the remains of the apostle Saint James are believed to be buried. At first, Tom wants nothing more than to collect his son’s remains and return home, but ultimately, he decides to finish the Camino himself, to honor his son. Along the way, Tom discovers not only beautiful landscapes and friendly people, but also a deeper understanding of grief, community, and faith.

The Camino is one of the world’s best-known pilgrimages. It generally takes 30 to 40 days to hike, and it draws seekers of every kind: some out of devotion, some out of curiosity, and some, like Tom, out of sheer desperation. The Camino is not unique. In Japan, pilgrims walk the Kumano Kodo, an ancient network of routes through the Kii (Key-ee) Mountain Range. Stretching more than 600 miles, the Kumano Kodo winds through forests and shrines, offering pilgrims weeks of spiritual reflection. In Scotland, trekkers clamber up hill and down dale, passing lochs and glens along the West Highland Way. Here in America, we have the Appalachian Trail and Pacific Crest Trail, running thousands of miles from Georgia to Maine, and Mexico to Canada. While these are not explicitly religious pilgrimages, many hikers report a deepened sense of spirituality or faith after making these hikes.

For many pilgrims, the journey itself becomes the teacher because *walking changes us*. Pilgrimages are less about reaching a destination, and more about what happens along the way. The conversations, the discoveries, the scenery, the peace, and the inner shifts of the heart are what make pilgrimages unique.

Which is why it is no surprise that, in Luke 24, we meet two disciples of Jesus on the road: walking, talking, questioning, learning and slowly discovering that the risen Christ is beside on the journey. The story opens on the afternoon of the resurrection. “Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened” (Luke 24:13-14). These two disciples are not celebrating; they are leaving. They are not walking toward anything; they are walking away from Jerusalem. They’ve seen enough, heard enough, and had enough. They are walking away from frustrated hope and dashed expectations. “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21).