

Today’s passage is in a real sense the climax of the Emmaus road story. The “stranger” is revealed to be none other than Jesus himself, obviously alive again after his execution on the Cross! Physical sight merges with spiritual awareness as the two disciples finally recognize their Master. Although Jesus rose in a glorified body, not completely subject to the laws of physiology, it was still physical and therefore visible, as this episode clearly reveals.

I’d like us to take a look at a painting of this story as an artistic commentary on the gospel. In his painting “Supper at Emmaus” Rembrandt used light to draw the eye and attention of the viewer to the figure of Jesus. However, the artist also used what might be called “reverse lighting.” As the uncontested master of Dutch art in the seventeenth century, Rembrandt experimented with different techniques to translate his vision of humanity in the world. Here he presents Jesus in silhouette, indicating the physical yet glorious nature of his body and the fact that there is something unearthly and “unseeable” about him. But the popping eyes of one disciple, staring with incredulity, convinces us that he is seeing something unquestionably physical. As Jesus shares bread with the disciples, their knowledge is transformed through the sense of sight, and we are invited to engage in the drama with them.

Although a number of scholars argue that verse 30 is not a description of communion, it is fitting to celebrate the Lord’s Supper this week in the lead up to Easter and at 8:00 PM next Sunday. The Lord’s Supper offers an opportunity for all of us to see, touch, and taste the body and blood of our Lord.

Even as we add the word SIGHT today, the three figures are out of sight—presumed to be in the village. These two travelers: Were they friends? Brothers? Husband and wife? We have no idea. Just Cleopas and whomever. Perhaps the reason one of them remains unidentified in Luke’s narrative is so that we may insert our own names into the story. Cleopas and David, or Cleopas and Debbie, or Cleopas and Tina, or Cleopas and Jim, or Cleopas and Kathy, or Cleopas and Karl, on the road, headed home to Emmaus.

Inserting our own name into the story makes good sense to me. Because they were just like us. They had the same concerns that we have which are common in every century: keeping body and soul together, keeping out of trouble, keeping in step with the times, keeping a stiff upper lip in the face of dashed hopes and shattered dreams. Just like us.

They were religious folk, just like us, having walked the several hour walk to Jerusalem a few days before. With a real sense of excitement, they had gone to the holy city for the Passover, an event no good Jew would ever miss; but also to be near Jesus, one whom they had come to look on as Israel’s deliverer, the Messiah. But now they were going home—dejected, depressed, defeated.

Today we’re focused on *sight*, specifically, the ability to see Jesus in this world, and the ability to see the world as Jesus sees it. From the Eastern Orthodox tradition comes the story of a man who went to a monastery and told the abbot he wanted to *see* God. “How many prayers, how many days of fasting will I have to undergo before I see God?” he asked. The abbot stood up from behind his desk. “So you want to see God,” he said. “Come with me.” And the abbot led the man down many winding corridors and dark staircases until they came at last to the kitchen, and finally to the place where the dishes were washed. There, covered with grease and grime, was the lowliest, most deficient of all the monks. The abbot pointed to him and said, “God.”

I've always liked the story of a breakfast experience, told by Fred Craddock, a teacher of preachers. He was stuck in Winnipeg, Canada in the midst of an October snow storm that paralyzed the city. Everything was shut down and his host could not even make it to Fred's hotel to pick him up for breakfast.

So, for breakfast, Fred found himself at a crowded bus depot café about two blocks from his hotel. As he entered, somebody scooted over to let him in a booth. A big man with a greasy apron came over to the table and asked him what he wanted. Not knowing what the café served, Fred asked to see a menu.

"What'd ya want with a menu?" the man asked. "We have soup." "Then I'll have soup," he said. Just what he wanted—soup for breakfast.

The man brought the soup and Craddock says it was an unusual looking soup. It was grey, the color of a mouse. He did not know what was in it, but he took a spoon and tasted it. Awful! "I can't eat this," he said. So he sat in that crowded café warming his hands around the bowl, railing against the world, stuck in Winnipeg.

Then, the door opened and someone yelled, "Close the door," and she did. A woman came in. She was middle-aged, had on a coat, but no covering for her head. Someone scooted over and let her in a booth. The big man with the greasy apron came over and the whole café heard this conversation:

"What'd ya want?"

"Bring me a glass of water," she said.

The man brought the water, took out his tablet and repeated the question. "What'd ya want?"

"Just the water."

"Lady, you gotta order something."

"Just the water."

The man's voice started rising: "Lady, I've got paying customers here waiting for a place, now order!"

"Just the water."

"You order something or you get out!"

"Can I stay and get warm?"

"Order or get out." So, she got up. The people at the table where she was seated got up, people around her got up, the folks that let Fred sit at their table got up, Fred got up, and they all started moving towards the door.

"OK!" the big man with the greasy apron said. "She can stay." And everybody sat down. He even brought her a bowl of that soup. Fred asked the man sitting next to him, "Who is she?"

"I never saw her before," he said, "but if she ain't welcome, ain't nobody welcome."

Then, Fred Craddock said, all you could hear was the sound of people eating that soup. "Well, if they can eat it, I can eat it," he said. So he picked up his spoon and started eating his soup. "It was good soup. I ate

all of that soup. It was strange soup. I don't remember ever having it before" he said. "As I left I remembered eating something that tasted like that before. The soup that day tasted like bread and wine [passed around for all who are hungry]." (From *Craddock Stories*, Mike Graves and Richard Ward, eds., St. Louis:Chalice Press, 2001)

On any Sunday morning in America, modern versions of Cleopas and Claudia, or Cleopas and Greg, or Cleopas and Barb, or Cleopas and Ted...come walking down the road, and come in the church door. The powerful and the powerless, the chiefs and the Indians, the highest and the lowest—each with their own problems, each yearning for the presence of the risen Lord...and finding him. But like Cleopas and his friend with many names, there is the danger that, once they leave this hallowed hall, they are too preoccupied, too busy, too stressed out, to actually *recognize him* out there where we all live. I think that is sad, because the truth is the risen Lord is wherever he is needed—with us, even if we don't know it or see him.

As you walk along the road, talking about all the things that have come to pass—participating in the business of life—keep your eyes open. You just may glimpse, out of the corner of your eye, a stranger who comes to walk with you. At first you may not recognize him; but then you will sense a growing warmth, as your heart begins to burn within you. And then the moment arrives, magnificent and unexpected, when you finally SEE who it is.

He will vanish from your sight once again. He always does. That's his way. Yet, you can know without a doubt he will return; and you will SEE him again; somewhere down the road.

Amen!