

Easter 3, Year A  
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St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL  
April 23, 2023  
Acts 2:14a, 22-36-41  
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17  
1 Peter 1:17-23  
Luke 24:13-35

## **Solvitur Ambulando**

For almost eight years, I served at the largest parish in the entire church: Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the world's busiest airport almost every single year since 1998.

Walking to Emmaus is an image, a metaphor that I used often in my work as chaplain at Atlanta airport. As airport chaplains, we thought a lot about what it means to encounter someone in the midst of a journey, to meet them where they are, engage with them, and see what kind of encounter might unfold, what disclosures might be made, how God might show up.

In my work as an airport chaplain, I rarely had to ask people questions when I was assisting them in the airport. Usually, as we would start walking, they would start talking. They would begin to disclose the details of their trip: what had happened, why they were traveling, where they were headed.

Hearing these many stories was often quite powerful. In that context, walking with me, they would often share details of a spiritual nature, by which I mean, a crucial, personal nature; something about their relationship with themselves, with other people—known or unknown—and with the Divine as well. The walk to Emmaus happened over and over and over for me in my life as chaplain at ATL.

As we see in many different contexts of chaplaincy, including street chaplaincy on the streets of Key West, there are a lot of people who are working on a lot of things, who are confronting many issues, and who, for whatever reason or reasons, don't have easy access to what we might identify as the more usual means of pastoral care or spiritual care and support.

If we go to where they are, we can more easily interact with them. This is basically the working hypothesis of chaplaincy. If we are with people, if we get proximate, we can more easily comprehend the reality of their situation.

That's where we find ourselves in today's gospel. Two people, whom the text identifies as followers of Jesus, as disciples, are leaving Jerusalem. It's the same day of the Resurrection; it's still Easter Day. It's the same day that Jesus has been appearing in other places, like behind closed and locked doors to the group of fearful disciples hiding inside as we heard last Sunday.

These people today are walking. As so often happens in Luke, the gospel action takes place on the road and on the move, often outdoors in the wider environment.

I've heard a lot of people say a lot of different things about why this pair, Cleopas, the one who's named, and his companion, are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of the Resurrection. Some people say they are afraid, and they are running away from Jerusalem. Other people say, they probably live in Emmaus, and they're just going home after all these unbelievable and difficult events of the past three days. It's about seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

A lot of different theories. Who knows who's right? I like to think this pair of people are modeling for us a new way of being the disciples of Jesus. But it really isn't a new way. It's kind of what Jesus himself was doing very often, especially in Luke's gospel where so much happens on the move, on the road.

How many times do we find, not only in Luke, but especially in Luke, that Jesus is going; Jesus is moving; Jesus is walking. Usually he is in the company of friends. But he also walks by himself, including right up a mountain to spend time alone; including right along the way of the cross. So, this is not a new pattern exactly, this practice of walking.

They are walking to Emmaus just as Jesus himself has walked to so many places, often in their company. Why would they walk to Emmaus? Maybe they are afraid. Maybe they live there. But I tend to think they are walking to figure things out.

In the wake of trauma, body movement and exercise can be lifesaving and lifegiving as we metabolize trauma and make sense of what has happened to us. Luke says it's Jesus who appears to them walking along the road, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. Trauma does that. It makes it hard to see what's right in front of you. It often makes it difficult to remember what and whom you know.

Maybe you have heard this Latin phrase: *solvitur ambulando*. "It is solved by walking." *Solvitur ambulando*.

People say, although this phrase is Latin, that it has come down to us from Greek philosophers arguing over whether motion is a reality. And the response of one to another, of Diogenes to Xeno, was to stand up and walk away, demonstrating motion is real.

Other people say we can trace this back to St Augustine of Hippo and that it's a phrase attributable to him which means, "a problem for which there is a working or workable solution." *Solvitur ambulando*.

But now, as so often happens with so many things, the phrase has come down to us and, in retrospect, we can see many different possible meanings and applications for this notion that, "It is solved by walking."

So, I'm suggesting to you today that Cleopas and his companion, both disciples of Jesus although not members of the twelve who number only eleven at this point, are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of the Resurrection because they are processing what has happened.

They are working through the trauma they have been living for the last three days. All these things they couldn't have imagined. All their experiences in the company of Jesus. And then, all these things they are feeling in the wake of Jesus' death; all their sadness and disbelief and grief because they do not know personally yet the reality of the Resurrection.

They are walking. They are on a kind of Camino. It is solved by walking. They are walking to Emmaus. And what happens? They are joined in the midst of their deep, intense conversation by a stranger who asks, "What are you talking about together as you walk along?" And they stop. The text says they are sad. Cleopas says, "Are you the only

person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about these things?" And the stranger says, "What things?"

And they begin to tell the story of their life with Jesus and of Jesus' life and then the tragic, traumatic, devastating events they have just lived through: the false charges against him, the sham of a trial, how he was beaten and lynched by the state, and buried. And how just that morning, the third day, some women of their group had visited the grave and found it empty and told the rest of them they had seen angels who said he was alive. And then some others went to check it out for themselves, also found the grave empty, but didn't see him. But their hopes are dashed and their hearts hurt. They had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel, and they don't know what it means yet that the grave is empty.

And then the stranger begins to explain to them all these things from the scriptures, walking them along in a teaching that keeps going until they draw near to this village of Emmaus, which is, apparently, where Cleopas and his companion were headed all along. And it seems like the stranger will keep going, but they invite him, "Please come in and stay with us." And he does.

They sit down to have something to eat. And the stranger takes bread, and blesses it, and breaks it, and gives it to them: take, bless, break, give—this very familiar fourfold action they have seen often: at the feeding of the five thousand, at the feeding of the three thousand, at supper just three nights before.

In the midst of something so familiar, something mundane yet somehow redolent of meaning, reminiscent of belonging they realize, they recognize him and realize that the stranger encountered on the road is in fact the risen Christ. What strangers have you encountered recently? Does it occur to you to treat them as Christ? Does it occur to you what might happen if you do? Does it occur to you what might happen if you don't? What opportunities seem so random and yet are divinely appointed?

As soon as they recognize him, realizing the stranger is in fact the risen Christ, he vanishes from their sight. Just like you can't hold the Tao, you cannot capture the risen Christ. You cannot contain the risen Christ.

But you can encounter the reality of living the Resurrection, for that resurrection of Christ brings new possibilities for living in many ways.

Because the risen Christ is not only the grownup Jesus back from the dead, raised by God our Creator. The risen Christ is also the Jesus who was an exile in childhood, fleeing governmental oppression with his parents into another country to find safety. The risen Christ is also the Jesus who refused to be someone other than himself, who refused to betray his mission and message, his true identity, his profound understanding of God, who would not back down and blend in and accommodate at the cost of his integrity. He would not accommodate the values of the dominant culture and the agenda of those in power.

Sometimes in order to follow Jesus, we have to risk the life we know for the life that through the reality of Resurrection can be. Sometimes we are called to give up our current circumstances in order to move into places and situations new to us that offer more life, especially when the circumstances we are leaving are increasingly death-dealing. Sometimes we need to take a walk, make a pilgrimage, embark upon a new journey, move into a new chapter.

And sometimes we are called to stay put but to embrace new experiences and ideas. If you are working on something, metabolizing something, working out how new information or a new experience, new knowledge should be integrated into your life, consider taking up this ancient Christian practice of discernment, this quintessential human practice of integrating information known as walking. Take a walk. Regularly. Habitually. Mindfully. Gratefully. Take a walk. Make a Camino of some sort. It is solved by walking.

The walk to Emmaus is in some ways a template for what will become Christian pilgrimage. Cleopas and his friend walk to Emmaus; they recognize the risen Christ; and Luke says, they turn around that very night and walk the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell others what has happened on the road. There's the pattern of pilgrimage: leaving a familiar place; going to a different place; having an encounter; returning to tell about it and apply it in community.

This is the pattern of living: facing change; moving through obstacles; experiencing joy; returning and adding value to community. It's the fourfold gospel journey.

It is what we're here for. It is what we're made for. It's what God gives us. It's what we give back to God and the world.

It is solved by walking. Some of are about to walk out and walk on into new chapters far away from here. Some of us are only in Key West for a day or two. And some of us are going to stay on through the hot summer like we have not too much sense, but we also will be walking into new circumstances and opportunities. We are walking, on pilgrimage together. So, walk on, dear ones. In the company of the risen Christ and one another, let's walk on.