



Emmaus Road
Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; April 19, 2026
3rd Sunday of Easter; Earth Day Celebration
Luke 24:13-35

A few years ago, I made plans for a clergy retreat at Virginia Beach with my friend, Sarah Nave. The idea was to spend time together, take long walks, do a little stargazing, and discuss Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. It just so happened one of Sarah's parishioners owned a condo just across from the beach and she had offered it to us for the weekend.

By early Friday afternoon, Sarah and I arrived, got settled in, and then sat down to chat. I mentioned that Barbara Brown Taylor's book had made the cover of *Christian Century*. Sarah responded that it had also made the cover of *Time* magazine and then handed me her copy of it. A little later, we heard someone making noises outside the condo. Honestly, we didn't think much of it UNTIL we realized we had no electricity. We went to the office to find out what the problem was, and the manager made a call, only to return with these words, "Well, it appears the electric bill has not been paid." Immediately Sarah called her friend, who was mortified. After a couple more phone calls it was discovered that the bill had not been received and the person who took care of such details was traveling in West Virginia. In other words, with the electricity being disconnected on a Friday afternoon, the problem would not be resolved during our little retreat. Walking back toward the condo, determined to enjoy our time together—with or without electricity—we couldn't help but laugh when we realized the irony of our situation: What a perfect opportunity to "learn to walk in the dark."

One of the main themes of Taylors' book is how we tend to believe good things happen in the light but not in the darkness. She writes,

Darkness is shorthand for anything that scares me—either because I am sure that I do not have the resources to survive it or because I do not want to find out. If I had my way, I would eliminate everything from chronic back pain to the fear of the devil from my life and the lives of those I love. At least I think I would. The problem is this: when, despite all my best efforts, the lights have gone off in my life, plunging me into the kind of darkness that turns my knees to water, I have not died. The monsters have not dragged me out of bed and taken me back to their lair. Instead, I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.

My favorite part of the book is when Taylor goes one night with her husband, Ed, and their dog, Dancer, out to a high hill on their farm in north Georgia to watch the moon rise. They find a good place and sit and wait and watch. "How long has it been since we've done this?" her husband asks. "Twenty years," Taylor responds. "Why is that?" he says. The answer makes her so sad she cannot say it out loud: "We have been too busy—for twenty years."

Too busy for twenty years... I wonder how often the same thing is true for us—not only in our spiritual lives, but in our relationship with the earth itself. We have been too busy to watch the moon rise... too busy to notice the birds returning in the spring... too busy to see the ways creation speaks of God's presence. And when we stop paying attention, it becomes easier to take the earth for granted. But when we slow down—when we step outside, sit beneath the night sky, and pay attention—we may notice God showing up in unexpected places, in unexpected ways.

While our gospel reading from Luke might not seem fitting for an Earth Day sermon, if we look closely, we'll see that it fits the bill quite nicely. For, this story is about walking, noticing, hospitality, the breaking of bread, and recognizing God in the ordinary gifts of life. After all, Resurrection faith is not only discovered in sanctuaries—it's discovered on roads, under open skies, on the very earth God declared good.

Two of Jesus' followers are on their way to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. They've put all their hopes and dreams into Jesus, but he has gotten himself killed. It is a dark time. And just when they are getting used to the idea that he is dead, the women have come to tell them that the tomb is empty, and angels have proclaimed Jesus is alive. What are they to make of it all? This is what they are discussing on their journey. Then Jesus, whom they are kept from recognizing, approaches and asks what they're talking about. He listens intently as they catch him up to speed. Then he becomes their teacher as he interprets Scripture in a new way—as he interprets Scripture in light of himself.

Approaching the village, Jesus starts to walk on ahead, but they urge him to stay with them. Jesus, always gracious, accepts their hospitality. It is there, at their table, that everything changes. The

guest becomes the host, and in the breaking of the bread their eyes are opened—they recognize him. And in that very moment, he vanishes from their sight. Quickly, they race back to Jerusalem, hearts pounding with wonder, only to find the Eleven already proclaiming, “It’s true! The Lord is risen!” The two add their own witness to the chorus: yes—he was made known to us in the breaking of the bread. It’s worth noticing that the disciples see differently only after their eyes are opened—only after Christ gives them a new perspective, a new way of seeing their sorrow, and the world and their place in it.

Recently, astronauts aboard the Artemis II mission traveled farther from Earth than any humans have gone in more than fifty years. During their journey, astronaut Victor Glover shared these words: “Trust us—you look amazing, you look beautiful, and from up here, you also look like one thing. Homo sapiens—all of us. No matter where you're from or what you look like, we're all one people.” Later he added, “As we draw closer to the Moon and farther from Earth, continuing to unlock the mysteries of the cosmos, I want to remind you of one of the greatest mysteries on Earth—and that is love... To all of you down there on Earth and around Earth, we love you—from the moon.”

The Artemis II team, like astronauts before them, experienced what has been called the “overview effect”—that moment of beholding Earth from space and suddenly seeing life itself in a new way. In some ways, the Emmaus story is about that kind of shift in perspective. The disciples believe their world has ended—but when their eyes are opened, they glimpse everything through resurrection light and everything changes. Resurrection offers them a new way of living within God’s unfolding story of love, mercy, and belonging for all people.

For two of Jesus’ followers, the Road to Emmaus is littered with broken dreams—until Christ shows up. Darkness and hopelessness begin to lose their grip when he walks beside them, talks with them, and opens the Scriptures before them like a lantern on a dark path. Such is the way of Jesus. He doesn’t wait for us at the destination. He meets us along the way. He meets us in our confusion and in our questions, in the long miles of grief and uncertainty. He meets us when we gather around tables, when we share bread grown from the soil, when we offer hospitality to friend and stranger alike.

Still today, Jesus comes. He comes to show himself to us—in the breaking of bread, in quiet conversations, in those moments when our hearts begin to burn with recognition. He comes to help us see our lives in the light of his own, to remind us that no road is too long, no night too dark, no hope too lost, to be found again. So, whether we walk in daylight or in shadow, hope is ours. The road is not empty. The table is not bare. The story is not over. Because Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed!