

This “on the road to Emmaus” story has become a favorite of mine. It’s one of those that holds so much for us to consider as we walk along with those travelers. And there’s a line in it that feels like it could have come straight out of our own lives.

*“We had hoped.”*

That’s it. Just three words. But they carry so much.

We had hoped this plan would turn out differently. We had hoped things would make sense by now. We had hoped for a better diagnosis. We had hoped that the relationship would last. We had hoped the world would feel a little less fragile than it does.

*“We had hoped.”*

And when the disciples say it, you can hear what’s underneath. It’s not just a sentence. It’s grief and disappointment. The kind that comes when something didn’t become what you thought it would be.

They are walking along the road, processing together, retelling what happened, trying to make sense of it and land somewhere solid.

And in the telling, they’ve already come to a conclusion. It’s over. It didn’t work. Whatever Jesus was about, it’s done.

*“We had hoped.”*

We do the same thing—turning our experiences into stories.

We take the things that happen in our lives and turn them into a story. A story about what they mean. A story about what’s possible now. A story about who we are and who other people are and what God is like.

Gradually, we grow attached to these stories, don’t we?

And the stories we tell aren’t bad or wrong. They heal us. They help us make sense of things and stand up again.

But over time, even a good story can become a closed one. And maybe that’s the question this Gospel asks us.

What stories are you attached to?

Perhaps it’s the story about who you are?

“I’m just not someone who does that.” (Fill in the blank.)

“I’m not good with change.”

“I’ve always been this way.”

Maybe some of it was true at one point. Maybe that protected you. Maybe it helped you survive something. But at some point, it stops being a description... and starts becoming a limit.

Or maybe it's a story about someone else?

"Well, this is just who they are." "They'll never change."

"This is just how this relationship works."

Maybe that story grew out of real experience, and maybe it's been earned. But sometimes that story becomes so fixed that we can no longer see what might still be unfolding. We stop making room to be surprised. We stop making room for grace.

And there are even the stories we tell about God.

"I prayed, and it didn't change anything."

"I guess God just doesn't show up that way." (The way we hoped for.)

Those stories don't come out of nowhere. They come out of real experience. Real disappointment. But even those stories, over time, can harden into something final in our minds.

*"We had hoped."*

And then, right in the middle of that story, the disciples are telling each other on the road, Jesus shows up.

Not as a flash of light or a voice from heaven. Not even as someone they recognize. He shows up as a stranger who interrupts them.

*"What are you talking about?"* he asks.

And they're almost incredulous. *"Where have you been?"*

Jesus doesn't answer their question directly. Instead, he interrupts their interpretation. He doesn't dismiss their grief, but he challenges the meaning they've assigned to it. He opens the story again, not by erasing what has happened, but by widening what it might mean for them now.

And I wonder if that's one of the ways resurrection comes to us. Not as an answer. Not as immediate relief. But as an interruption in the dialogue of our life. An interruption of a story we've already decided is finished.

Because sometimes the hardest thing to let go of is not our pain, but our explanation of it. The story we've built around it. The meaning we've assigned. The certainty that says, "This is just how it is now."

*"We had hoped."*

And then, into that space, someone shows up. A conversation you didn't expect. A person who asks different questions.

The Irish poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama writes, *"It is in the shelter of each other that the people live."* Sometimes the truth comes to us through another person entering our story

and shifting it slightly – not by fixing it, but by widening it, even when we don't recognize who they are.

And here's what I find most surprising. They don't understand this stranger. They don't recognize him. They don't even fully agree with him. But when they reach the place where they're staying, they say something simple. Something that is in their hearts.

*"Stay with us."*

They don't say, "We're convinced." They don't say, "Now we understand." They simply say, "Stay."

And that may be the holiest moment in the whole story. Because they offer hospitality before they have clarity. They make space before they have certainty. They welcome before they understand.

Joan Chittister puts it this way, *"The test of spirituality is not how much we know, but how much we love."* And in that moment, they choose love. It would have been easy to send him on his way. After all, they are tired. They are grieving. They don't owe this stranger anything.

*But, even in the middle of "we had hoped," something in them says, "Stay."*

And frankly, that's not usually how we work. We tend to wait for clarity. We tell ourselves that once we understand, we will respond. Once we are sure, we will open the door. Once we know who someone is, then we will decide how to receive them.

But this story turns that around. It is only after they say "stay," only after they make space at the table, that their eyes are opened.

They didn't recognize Jesus and then invited him in. They invited him in, and then they recognized Jesus. And it happens, the simplest and most ordinary of actions.

So, this makes me wonder...How often does Christ come to us right in the middle of our everyday moments? Comes to us in the form of a person who interrupts our assumptions? Shows up in a conversation we didn't plan to have? In a moment that slows us down just enough to notice something new? And we almost miss it because it doesn't look like what we hoped for.

So maybe the invitation today is not to try to fix our hopes. Maybe the invitation is simply to notice them. To name them.

And then to remain just open enough to ask, who is walking beside me right now? What is being said that I don't yet understand? Where might God be gently interrupting the ending I have already written?

And then, to say, "Stay."

Stay with me in this uncertainty. Stay with me in this conversation. Stay with me even if I don't recognize you yet.

Because it is so often there, in that small act of openness, that something begins to shift. Something begins to open. Something begins to be revealed.

Because the deepest truth of this story is not that the two travelers finally recognized Jesus. The deepest truth is that Jesus had been walking with them the whole time.

In their disappointment. In their confusion. In their unfinished understanding. Right there on the road of "we had hoped", Jesus was right there.

And the same is true for us.

Christ walking beside us. Christ within the stranger. Christ in the interruption.

Christ in the invitation. "*Stay with us.*"