
Open our Eyes, Lord

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 19 April 2026

Acts 2:14a, 36-41 • Luke 24:13-35



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

When I was a kid, we lived about an hour's drive south of San Francisco, and my grandparents, my father's parents, lived in a big house there, not far from the Golden Gate Bridge. You could see the bridge from their back balcony. Every month or two, we went to their house for dinner. At that time, we had a big Mercury station wagon — not like the little hatchbacks they call wagons now, but a big, long car, with a rear gate and a rear window that went up and down. There were five in my family, and I'm the youngest. My parents sat in the front seat, of course; my brother and sister sat in the back seat — they were bench seats. And I rode in the "way back" — that's what we called it. My father put a cushion from a lawn chair back there, so I could lie down in the back.

On the way home, I always fell asleep on the cushion during the long drive. When we got home, I didn't want to wake up. I did my best to walk into the house with my eyes closed — and therefore still asleep — and get right into

bed. I remember how bright the lights in the house were. I didn't want to admit that I was actually awake. I guess I just wanted to keep that nice sleepy feeling all the way into my bed.

Today we are on a different journey. We are again on the road to Emmaus, with Cleopas and the other, unnamed, disciple. (He needs a name, doesn't he? Let's call him Theosunantus, a name I made up of the two Greek words for "God" and "to meet" — so, the one who meets God. Theo for short. So Cleo and Theo!) As they walk, a stranger joins them. They don't know it is Jesus, but of course it is. And is this not how it often happens? When we are alone or bereft or in mourning, and it seems that we have been abandoned, that is often when we feel Jesus's presence with us. There is a great line from the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* where Blanche DuBois says, "Sometimes there's God so quickly." It is when God feels as close as our breath, and he comes when we most need comfort. So it is with Theo and Cleo. The events of the crucifixion, only two days before, are still raw and painful; and the surprise of Mary's account of seeing Jesus risen has turned their heads right around — they don't know where they are, or what to believe, but a tremendous grief envelops them. And in that time of loss and sorrow, Jesus comes near. Jesus comes near us in our hearts, but it often seems as if he is sitting down beside us, or walking alongside us. The effect is the same: we are strengthened and sustained by his love and his care, just when we need it most.

The stranger is trying to help, as Jesus always helps us, just by listening. I can imagine Jesus walking alongside the two dispirited disciples, with his head bowed, and taking in all that they say (and what they leave unsaid as well). Jesus is a great listener, and good listening is a powerful thing. Cleo unloads quite a bit on the stranger — he speaks for a full paragraph in the Gospel, as if some restraint had been removed, and he felt free to tell the whole story to this unknown man they met on the road. In speaking there is understanding, and a beginning of healing; and Jesus offers that to them, and more, as he falls in beside them. He is still their guide and teacher.

It seems to me that Cleo and Theo are a bit like that sleepy little boy I used to be, not wanting, or not ready, to wake up to the truth of what has happened. They know what Jesus has said about himself, that he would rise again, but they don't believe it yet. They are still living in the time-before-Jesus. And in the time-before-Jesus, people stay dead. Their conviction that Jesus is dead and gone blinds them to the very presence of Jesus, right in front of them! They are keeping their eyes closed in order to avoid seeing the light around them. Also, Jesus perhaps keeps their eyes closed until the right moment, when they are ready to acknowledge who he really is.

Finally they arrive at Emmaus, where they had planned to spend the night. Jesus would have gone on, but they invite him to stay and spend the night at the inn with them, and as they begin the meal, Jesus reveals himself in the breaking of the bread. It's a powerful image of revelation, yet linked to a most mundane action: simply sharing out food at the beginning of a meal. In the blessing and the breaking and the sharing of the bread is our own salvation and the key to our faith. We experience it anew every time we celebrate Communion, as we will do in a few minutes.

And so we must invite Jesus into our own lives. Just as the thief hanging beside Jesus on that terrible day of crucifixion said, "Jesus, remember me," our Lord wants to be invited into our lives. Just as we often say in prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus," we must remember that God loves us and will not force himself or his Son on us. The author Jan Karon likes to say, "God is a gentleman," he waits to be asked in. Because Cleo and Theo invited Jesus to stay with them, that is exactly what Jesus will do — he will stay in their lives forever. Until the invitation is given, Jesus will be at the door; as soon as we honestly pray for him to come in, we will be enveloped in his love.

I relate strongly to this story of Cleo and Theo, and I give thanks to Luke and to God's inspiration that it is in the Bible. It is almost the whole Gospel in itself, told from a very human point of view. Who cannot see themselves in these two disciples? Lord, let our eyes always remain open to see you, and let us always welcome you into our hearts. In your name we pray. Amen.