



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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Our Road to Emmaus

By Keith June

“We had hoped...”

One of my favorite Bible passages is “the Road to Emmaus.” There is so much to love about this passage and so much to relate to. I am convinced that we are all very much on a journey – our journey will have ups and downs; it will have times of great celebrations and profound disappointments, as well.

Years ago, when I was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, a Chaplain friend asked if I might be willing to give a sermon on the biblical passage of the Road to Emmaus. It is the story of two disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, who are walking on the road to Emmaus. After the death of Jesus, the disciples are disappointed and distraught. As they make their walk, the disciples encounter a stranger. They proceed to tell the stranger of all that happened, about this prophet, who for three years had led them on a journey, a journey that had profoundly changed their lives.

Indeed, this figure had changed the lives of everyone he met. Cleopas says, "We had hoped..." But this Messiah had been executed by the Romans. In an instant, all their hopes and dreams were dashed. And not only had they lost their leader, they were now on the run.

As they relayed this story to the stranger, the stranger asked, "What things?" At which point, Cleopas says to the stranger (putting in more modern speech...), "Like dude, where have you been? Are you the only one who doesn't know the things that have happened?" At the end of the passage, as they near Emmaus, the stranger reveals himself as Christ, at which point they share a meal.

I think we are all very much on a journey. And part of the journey, indeed the most important part of the journey, are the people we meet. Many times, perhaps most times, we never really know the people we meet or how they might influence our lives. Maybe we figure it out quickly, or maybe it takes us a lifetime to fully understand and appreciate how the people we meet on our journey influence our lives.

Recently, our parish lost Father John Smith. John died on Easter morning. Many of us were lucky and blessed to have known him. When John was on the faculty at Episcopal High School as Chaplain and Chair of the Theology department in the late 1960's and early 1970's, he advocated for equity and access as Episcopal integrated its student body.

Throughout John's career, he worked tirelessly for liturgical changes, the ordination of women to the priesthood, racial reconciliation, as well as ordination and marriage rites for LGBT individuals. He established ecumenical outreach ministries, including a residential youth shelter in Loudoun County. It was John who helped to make Jonathan Daniels recognized as a martyr in the Episcopal Church.

It was John, who introduced me to the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity or ESCRU. ESCRU was an effort in the 1950's to work toward ending segregation in the Episcopal Church and building a church where all are welcomed, respected, and loved.

John saw every person as a unique and beloved child of God, worthy of his time, respect, and care.

Father John Smith was very much part of my journey to Emmaus. I had some great times with John, including watching World Series games, college basketball games, and even going to a Nats game. And occasionally, we actually got around to talking about faith. In all seriousness, we had some great talks about faith.

John profoundly impacted my life. And he did that in a very short period of time. I'm not sure I ever met anyone with John's decency, persistence, and ability to give dignity to everyone. He truly saw everyone as a child of God. John was very much a warrior for Social Justice.

And I had hoped. I had hoped for more great talks with John, more baseball games, and more basketball games.

But John spoke often of the Resurrection. His deep faith in the Resurrection serves to remind us and inspire us of the world beyond what we know.

As we make our journey on the Road to Emmaus, may we be reminded of the presence of God. May we know that God is in the midst of what we are experiencing, that He feels our pain, our joys, our grief, and that He walks with us. May we treat each stranger we meet as though they may be Christ, as we make our walk to Emmaus. Amen.

The Road to Emmaus

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast.¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹ “What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. (Luke 24:13–35)