



The Road to Emmaus

Lenten Study

Day 1

Read: Luke 24:13-35

Introduction

At most, it probably took the two followers of Jesus no more than a few hours (the distance was only seven miles) to walk from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. We will, in a sense, be walking that road for the 40 days of Lent. Each day we will focus on some element of this story. We, like the two travelers in the story, will seek to experience what they experienced at this crucial point in the birth of the Christian faith. We will walk with them each step of the way as they move from despair, to confusion, to enlightenment, and ultimately to joy.

Jesus had been crucified. His followers had hoped that he would bring an end to the oppression of Roman occupation, but this hope had come to an abrupt and devastating end. The excitement they had felt when they heard Jesus teach and saw him work miracles had been dashed. It was as though a wonderful dream had come to a crashing end.

Then Jesus, unknown, appears alongside these two as they trudge home from this horrible experience. He wants to know why they are so downtrodden. They can't believe that he does not know what has happened. Not only are they distraught about Jesus' crucifixion, but also they are confused about a report that his body had disappeared and angels had materialized saying Jesus was alive. Patiently, Jesus leads them through a study of Scripture to help them see that what had happened was what should have been expected all along.

Still, they do not recognize Jesus until they sit at a meal and he breaks the bread. Then, they joyfully return to Jerusalem and find confirmation that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead. They have run the gamut of emotions. Maybe it will be the same for us as we walk this road over the next 40 days.

R&D As you think about how Jesus met these two on the road, recall how Jesus "met" you. What similarities and what differences do you see?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, as we walk the pathways of our lives, thank you that you are there through your Holy Spirit to walk with us each step of the way.

Day 2

Read: Matthew 27:32-44

Everything That Happened

The two travelers were talking about "everything that had happened." That would have been Jesus' crucifixion, as we read about today. It is appropriate to begin this Lent, a penitential season, by focusing on Jesus on the cross.

The account we read today is stark: "When they crucified him..." (v.35). Surrounding it are significant details. Simon of Cyrene is pressed into service to carry Jesus' cross because the beatings he had suffered left Jesus unable to carry it himself. Jesus is offered wine mixed with gall

(something in the nature of a narcotic to reduce the pain) but he refuses it; he is to suffer fully but with a clear mind. The soldiers cast lots for his clothing, a normal practice but one that fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 22.

If the pain of the crucifixion itself were not enough, Jesus is pelted with insults from all directions. From John 2:19, we learn that Jesus had prophesied, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Although he had apparently been talking about the temple of his body rather than the structure from which he had just driven out the money changers (John 2:13-16), his words have become an important part of the charges made against him before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:61). Even Jesus’ closest followers must have wondered, if Jesus was in fact the Son of God, why could he not simply come down from the cross and prove his divine powers to the people.

Can we then feel the pain for the two on the road to Emmaus as they reflected on these things: how could things have gone so completely wrong from the triumphal entry to Jerusalem (what we call Palm Sunday) to the actual crucifixion?

R&D *Why did things go so wrong?*

Prayer: *Thank you, Jesus, for all you suffered on our behalf. May we never forget the depth of your love for us.*

Day 3

Read: Luke 10:1-7

As They Discussed These Things Together

The one comfort the pair had on their way to Emmaus was that they had each other. They could discuss together the things that were perplexing them.

This is the genius shown to us by Jesus in our Scripture passage for today. The 72 were sent out two by two. In sending messengers out to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, Jesus gave them very specific instructions, some of which we see in this reading. But the most important thing is that he did not send them out alone. I well remember that the only time I ever participated in a “door-to-door” evangelism campaign, the pair of us could not have done it if we had not been there to encourage one another.

The fact is that we need each other. If we are bound up in our own concerns, we cannot see the bigger picture. There needs to be another who is willing to listen to our troubles as well as our best ideas to give some perspective on the situation. We need someone who can be objective about things that are important to us, but which we cannot see clearly.

The “two by two” principle is especially important in times of grief. The person with whom we share our pain may be as grief stricken as we are. Certainly that would have been true in the case of our two travelers to Emmaus. Twice the burden-bearers, half the load is a rule that applies here. There is something about knowing that we are not alone in the problems, doubts, confusions, and hopes we share that makes them much more easily dealt with and resolved. Thus the two walked on, feeling the pain but sharing it.

R&D *Reflect on how the sharing of your burdens with others has helped in various ways.*

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You know me in my joys and in my pains, but I thank You that there are also others who show me Your love when I especially need it.*

Day 4

Read: Genesis 3:8-9

Jesus Walked Along with Them

There is a sense in which, when Jesus joined the two along the road to Emmaus, something happened that had not happened since the third chapter of Genesis: God walked with mankind. True, God had walked among the people in the human form of Jesus, but Jesus, prior to his resurrection, was limited in time and space. Now he could walk anywhere, as God the Father had done in the Garden of Eden. That's one of the things that make the Road to Emmaus experience unique.

Let's compare the two experiences. In our Genesis reading, Adam and Eve were not happy to have God walking with them. They had just committed the sin that would be embedded in the spiritual DNA of all people for all time. They would undoubtedly have liked to have avoided having God around until (hopefully) He had forgotten what they had done. Not so. The wrath of God was getting ready to hit them a felling blow that would change the nature of mankind and of the world forever.

When the resurrected Jesus came to walk with our travelers on the road, however, an opportunity for reversal of the curse of Genesis 3 has occurred. It would not be clear immediately. The Holy Spirit must first come, and then the Apostles' understanding of the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for those who would give their lives to him.

And here is Jesus, ready to give these two a foretaste of what was to come. How God must have yearned, over all those centuries, to once again walk with His people in the way Jesus now did with these two. Perhaps we spend a lot of time thinking about our relationship with God without taking into consideration His desire to be in relationship with us!

R&D When have you last considered how God must feel about His desire to show you His love?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, my mind is not capable of understanding Your love for us and Your desire to be with us, but I am grateful that it is true.

Day 5

Read: Matthew 27:57-66

Their Faces Were Downcast

Despite the good news we considered in our last study, our travelers didn't recognize Jesus at first, so they were still downcast when he joined them. From our reading for today, we can understand just how disheartened all of the followers of Jesus must have been. Consider the pain of the people directly involved.

Joseph of Arimathea had been a secret disciple of Jesus. As a religious leader and member of the Sanhedrin, it took courage for him to ask for Jesus' body and provide for its burial. He probably didn't feel very brave, however; his primary feeling may have been either regret that he had not more stringently opposed Jesus' crucifixion or disappointment that he had not had more time with Jesus while he was still alive.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (see 27:56) were in the depths of grief. Jesus had freed Mary Magdalene from demonic possession (Luke 8:2) and a life of sin, and she had become an energetic and caring woman who traveled with Jesus and contributed to the needs of his disciples. As Jesus pointed out in Luke 7:47 (some believe the "sinful woman" who washed Jesus' feet

with her hair might have been Mary Magdalene), the one who is forgiven much loves much. Thus, the greater despair.

So it was that all of Jesus' followers were in the pain of defeat. They had not only lost a loved one, they had lost a magnificent dream, a vision of what could have been. When someone who had great promise dies or ruins his future, when our candidate for office (or our political party) is defeated, we are naturally downcast. Here, what had happened was infinitely a more important loss to the followers of Jesus.

R&D No matter how downcast we might be about something in our lives, our relationship with Jesus helps us keep it in perspective. Reflect on what it must have been like for the followers of Jesus who were downcast because that hope had been lost.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, that, in our despair, you are there with us always.

Day 6

Read: Matthew 16:13-20

"He Was a Prophet"

It had been 400 years since Israel had seen a prophet. Can you imagine being a member of a religion that had not perceived a message from God in 400 years? How they must have longed for a prophetic word from God even if the prophecies of the past had been, to say the least, often discomfoting. And so the people lived in the keen anticipation of a prophet.

Then Jesus was on the scene. Our travelers to Emmaus referred to Jesus as "a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). But, in our reading for today, Jesus has decided to "lay it all on the line" and find out what his closest followers thought him to be. The immediate reaction from them is that others thought him to be a prophet. But he wants to know *their* thoughts, not the thoughts of others. And so it is Peter, the leader of the bunch and the impetuous one, who blurts it out: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v.16).

A prophet could speak the words of God to the people, to encourage them or to warn and challenge them. The prophets of Israel were ones to be honored (even if they were often ignored or worse). But now one was on the scene who was much greater than a prophet. Jesus was God on earth. He was not limited to speaking the words of God, he could also fulfill those words! He was truly "powerful in word and deed."

The apparent loss of Jesus was not just a *physical and emotional* tragedy, the death of someone much admired; it would have been the greatest of all *spiritual* tragedies. But, as we know, he was not lost to us. He was just fulfilling the prophecies about himself and he had risen.

R&D In what ways was Jesus similar to, and different from, the prophets of Israel?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for revealing to Peter and to us who Jesus really is.

Day 7

Read: Matthew 21:1-11

Hope of Redeeming Israel

As Jesus joined our two travelers on the Road to Emmaus and began to question them about what had made them so downcast, they mention to him that "we had hoped that he was the one

who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). It had certainly looked as though that might be likely from our reading in Matthew today.

Jesus’ time had arrived. He and his disciples arrive at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives at the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jesus follows prophecy about himself in instructing the two what to do. As Jesus makes his entry into Jerusalem, he is fulfilling Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9, a humble Messiah mounted on a beast of burden. The crowds wildly and enthusiastically welcome Jesus as the messianic “son of David.” What we refer to as the Triumphal Entry has occurred, but the picture had a fatal flaw. The fickle crowd that hailed Jesus in today’s reading would shout, “Crucify him!” in a matter of days.

“The one who was going to redeem Israel,” the great warrior king like David, was not to be. Under the yoke of Rome, the people had hoped for one who would reverse their fortunes. Their short-sighted desires were not to be fulfilled, and it was impossible for them to see the eternal miracle that was being played out on the stage before them. Thus, the memory of what happened in today’s reading was deeply painful to Jesus’ two followers as they trudged homeward. “We had hoped” weighs heavy on their hearts.

R&D How would you feel if you presently lived in the Middle East under Sharia law?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the freedom we have in our country, but most of all, thank You for the freedom we have in Jesus Christ.

Day 8

Read: Luke 9:37-43a

Didn’t Find His Body

As we continue to reflect on what is going on in the minds and hearts of two followers of Jesus as they walk along the way, we come to the point of their telling the one who had joined them on the journey about the amazing things they had heard from the women. “They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find the body” (Luke 24:22b-23a). This was certainly perplexing to them.

As a parallel, consider our reading for today. Jesus had just come from the mountaintop experience of the Transfiguration into the reality of a crisis in the valley. There is, as a result, an abrupt shifting of emotions, just as our pair of travelers would have been experiencing at this point in their journey. The work Jesus did, his followers were to do also. Jesus had just been transfigured, manifesting the glory of God. Yet, the disciples continued to be disappointing because of their lack of faith. Jesus doesn’t hide his emotions concerning this perplexing situation.

Once Jesus takes the matter into his own hands the miracle of healing occurs. As a result, the people are utterly amazed. “How can these things happen?” they must be asking themselves. There is a combination of being astonished and confused. What had happened is hard to explain. That is undoubtedly how our two travelers also are feeling at this time, and probably how we feel when something totally inexplicable has happened. We crave, more than anything else, clarification. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus is getting ready to clarify.

R&D Reflect on an amazing or confusing thing that has recently happened in your life. How was it resolved?

Prayer: *Lord, help us, in the perplexities and confusion of life, to always look to You for the answers.*

Day 9

Read: Matthew 11:11-19

How Slow of Heart to Believe

In our last reading we saw Jesus' disappointment with his disciples because of their lack of faith. After listening to his companions on the road to Emmaus, Jesus has reached the same point of exasperation with them. Our reading for today is another illustration of the blindness of the people for not seeing who Jesus really is. How frustrating disbelief must have been for Jesus.

In our reading, Jesus has just responded to questions from John the Baptist who, in prison, was apparently beginning to have his own doubts about Jesus as the Son of God (vv.2-10). Jesus then speaks of John who was "more than a prophet" (v.9). John was the forerunner, fulfilling the role of Elijah who, based on Jewish tradition, was to precede the coming of the Messiah. Yet, Jesus points out, even John is less than the least in the Kingdom. That's because John was still a part of the old way of belonging to God: Judaism. Jesus, however, has inaugurated a new way.

Verses 16-19 then go on to deal with the skepticism of "this generation." John lived an austere lifestyle and called people to repentance. They labeled him a fanatic. Jesus came as one who loved, who was at home with the people. They called him a glutton, a drunkard and a friend of sinners. The one thing the people did not want to do was to take either of them seriously.

Everyone seems to have fallen short of Jesus' expectations, and now that was also true of these two fellow travelers. Non-Christians in the world around us also fall short of our hopes and expectations of them. Jesus showed patience with these two by gently leading them into truth. A good example for us to follow as well.

R&D *What have you found to be the most effective ways of reaching others for Christ?*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, give us patience to demonstrate who you are by our lives and our words that others may come into the glory of life in you.*

Day 10

Read: 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Jesus' Bible Study

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Thus, on the road to Emmaus began the Bible study all Christians wish they could have been a part of. Jesus patiently explains to the pair of travelers how the Old Testament had sought to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. Although we cannot be sure which particular passages of Scripture Jesus used at the time, over the coming days we will look at ones popularly believed to have been the most significant. That way we, with them, can share in Jesus' teaching.

First of all, however, we consider our reading for today: Paul's teaching on the importance of Scripture which, for people of that time, was what we call the Old Testament. He makes three especially important points.

Timothy had known the Scriptures from infancy. His grandmother and mother were both godly women who taught Scripture. If children know Scripture, it can stand them in good stead the rest of their lives, even if they go through a period of doubt and testing and straying from

Scripture. Paul is speaking to us as well as to Timothy about our responsibility to teach our children and grandchildren the Bible from an early age.

Secondly, Paul knew that Timothy had been convinced of the authenticity of Scripture because of the persons from whom he had learned it. It is when those who instruct us reveal in their lives the truth of what they teach that we can believe what they tell us. Once again, Paul is speaking to us as much as he is to Timothy. We need to be sure our lives reflect obedience to Scripture.

The third point is Paul's "definition" of Scripture: it is "God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (v.16). The whole Bible is the inspired word of God. It is trustworthy to be applied to our lives. It does all the things Paul says it does. With that confidence, over the next days, let us now look at what Scripture says about the Messiah.

R&D How do you respond to those who do not take Scripture seriously in our day? How could you respond to them most effectively?

Prayer: Lord, grant that we may hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture that we may hold fast to it and it to us for the remainder of our days.

Day 11

Read: Genesis 3:14-15

Satan's Defeat Foreshadowed

A first thing Jesus might have wanted to deal with in his Bible study on behalf of our two travelers was the nature of Satan and the necessity of his ultimate defeat at the hands of God's special representative on earth. Satan is portrayed as a snake in the story of the Fall (Genesis 3). Satan is our enemy who will do anything he can to get us to follow his evil, deadly plan. He had enticed Adam and Eve to disobey God in the one thing God had required of them, and now Satan would reign on earth until the time of his defeat had come.

The story of the Old Testament is one of "one step forward and two steps backward" because of the reign of Satan. Even a vague knowledge of Scripture reveals this to us. God continued to try to reach out to the people. Some would respond (Abraham, Moses and David among them); but, before long, the multitudes would fall away, looking to their own selfish ways rather than the ways of God. Until Jesus came, it was not a pretty picture.

Yet, our reading for today contains the key to Satan's defeat: "he will crush your head" (v.15b). There would be born of woman one who could subdue Satan and change the nature of spiritual warfare on earth forever. Satan could attack ("you will strike his heel") but not prevent the fulfillment of God's plan. In these early verses of Scripture, God was already revealing His ultimate plan for Satan's defeat, providing salvation to the world through His Son, Jesus Christ.

R&D Reflect on various ways in which Satan acted against the will of God in the Old Testament.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that we live on this side of Jesus' resurrection and that, although Satan still wreaks havoc in our world, we know his ultimate defeat.

Day 12

Read: Deuteronomy 18:14-22

The Prophet of God

In our reading for today, Moses tells the people that a prophet like himself would be raised up. The people asked not to hear the voice of God (directly) in the future, for they were fearful of the consequences. So God promises to raise up a prophet from among them who will speak His words; and God points out that those who do not listen to the prophet's words will be called to account by God Himself. He also explains how it can be determined whether someone who claims to be a prophet can be found to be true or false (*i.e.* whether the prophecy proves true or not).

The people probably thought that Joshua, as successor to Moses, was such a prophet. However, the general consensus among Bible scholars is that a series of prophets is what was meant in this passage. There would need to be prophets for succeeding generations following Moses. As we know from the Old Testament, there were, in fact, a number of prophets who spoke the word of God to the people over the succeeding centuries, and we will be looking at a number of their prophecies in the days ahead.

But, most significant is the fact that one was eventually to come, Jesus, the Messiah, who would be the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy. Stephen (Acts 7:37) certainly saw Jesus in this role, as did Peter in Acts 3:22. The coming of Jesus Christ to earth was not an afterthought, but a part of God's original plan. As a result, we can be sure that anything Jesus taught will always come true because that is the test God provided to determine the authenticity of His prophets.

R&D How do you feel about Jesus being referred to as a prophet in this passage in view of earlier conclusions in this study that Jesus was more than a prophet?

Prayer: Father God, thank You for revealing to us, in Scripture, Your unfolding plan for the world.

Day 13

Read: Isaiah 7:13-14; Matthew 1:18-25

Virgin and Child

The focus of our study today is on the Matthew passage. To understand the situation Joseph faced, we need to understand the marriage arrangements in his time, and how he would have understood the message from the angel.

There were three stages to a Jewish marriage: engagement, betrothal, and the marriage itself. The engagement was often arranged while the couple were quite young by the parents or a matchmaker. The betrothal, which lasted a year, was in the nature of a ratification of the engagement; during that time the couple would be regarded as husband and wife but were to refrain from sexual relations. The marriage then took place at the end of the year of betrothal. It was at this stage that Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant and had to make his decision about what to do.

Being told that Mary had conceived the child by the Holy Spirit, Joseph, as a Jew, would have had a different understanding than the Christians of today. The Holy Spirit is the indwelling God to the Christian, but to the Jew of Joseph's day it was through the Spirit of God that He performed His work of creation. In any event, by the grace of God, Joseph believed the angel and accepted Mary as his wife.

Matthew interprets the Isaiah passage as a prophecy of Jesus' birth. When we combine "You are to give him the name Jesus" (Savior) in Matthew 1:21 with "will call him Immanuel" (God with us) in Isaiah 7:14, the whole of Christianity is encompassed in those two names.

R&D *How do you relate to the Holy Spirit in your life?*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the faithfulness of Joseph. Thank You, Lord, for faithful fathers in our day.*

Day 14

Read: Isaiah 9:1-7

Light out of Darkness

Today's reading is one of the most specific prophecies applicable to Jesus as Messiah. The implication is that the child to be born will come from Galilee, Jesus' home territory. His coming will bring great joy, and will be light in the darkness (which we will look at more fully below). He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to his reign and he will bring justice and righteousness. Jesus has fulfilled every aspect of this prophecy. Surely this would have been one of the passages of Scripture Jesus would have relied upon in his Bible study with Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus.

Let us look more closely at two aspects of this prophecy. In Matthew 4:15-16, we are told that, after John the Baptist had been imprisoned, Jesus returned to Galilee and went specifically to Capernaum by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew says this happened in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2. Because of Jesus' presence in this area, the people saw "a great light." The apostle John referred to Jesus as "light" (John 1:9), and Jesus referred to himself as the "light of the world" (John 8:12). The symbol of a dark world that would just as soon hide from the light because its deeds are evil (John 3:19) is prevalent in Scripture.

Consider also the names by which the Messiah would be recognized in the Isaiah passage. "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father" speak to the nature of God Himself; Jesus is one with God and he is timeless. "Wonderful Counselor" reminds us of the Holy Spirit who, Jesus promised, would be with us following his time on earth. Unlimited by time and space, the indwelling Holy Spirit is always with us to counsel us in our needs. The "Prince of Peace" is the ruler of the Kingdom of God that came among us in Jesus, the Messiah.

What a glorious God we have. He has shined the light of Jesus Christ into our world. Shine, Jesus, shine!

R&D *Reflect on the ways Jesus met the prophecy in our reading for today.*

Prayer: *Lord, let Your light so shine among us that we may see Your glory in every way, every day.*

Day 15

Read: Ezekiel 34:20-25

Good Shepherd

In our reading from Ezekiel, the Sovereign Lord is showing His great displeasure with the religious leaders of the day. It is a part of a longer discourse in Ezekiel 34 on the shepherds of Israel. They are bad shepherds, taking care of only the "fat sheep" (meaning themselves and those like them) and driving away the "lean sheep" (the poor and needy).

Into this situation God will send a good shepherd, referred to as "my servant David" but meaning the Messiah. In Jeremiah 23:5, the Lord had said, "The days are coming when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is right in the land." He will be a perfect leader who will look to all the needs of all the people. There will be peace and

justice in the land, and the sheep may dwell in the safe protection of the Good Shepherd. We see here a reflection of Psalm 23. The Lord will be the Shepherd. He will lead the sheep into green pastures and beside quiet waters, and restore their souls. They will fear no evil and will be comforted.

Jesus would have been able to show our travelers on the road to Emmaus that he was the one who had been sent to fulfill these prophecies. The contrast would have been clear enough for any objective-minded Jew to see the difference between the way the Jewish leaders of the day, on the one hand, and Jesus, on the other, felt toward and treated the people. Jesus had declared, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), one who was willing to (and did) lay down his life for the sheep. The writer of Hebrews later refers to Jesus as the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (13:20-21). Could the prophecy and its fulfillment be any clearer?

R&D Reflect on the characteristics of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Prayer: The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

Day 16

Read: Isaiah 52:13–53:3

Suffering Servant

In our reading for today we are looking at the fourth of the so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah (see Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-7; and 50:4-11 for the others). This is the one most commonly referred to in the New Testament (Romans 10:16; Matthew 8:17; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Peter 2:22; and Luke 22:37). This Song so clearly explains the nature of the Messiah that we will look at it over two days.

As with many prophecies, they sounded at the time as though they were speaking to Israel's situation or that they related to a particular king; but Jesus would have been able to show our travelers how this one spoke of him. Isaiah says that the servant will be *marred beyond human likeness* (v.14). As a result, many were appalled because of him. This would be an apt description of Jesus, crowned with thorns, spat upon, and mocked (Mark 15:16-20); blindfolded and beaten (Luke 22:63-65); stripped (John 9:23); and nailed to a cross between two criminals (Mark 15:27). Isaiah's song reminds us of just how ugly the death of Jesus was; it was the price of our salvation.

Isaiah also tells us that Jesus was *rejected*. “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.... He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering” (vv.2-3). People are repulsed by him and turn away from him. We can see in this prophecy the sheer loneliness of the cross. Jesus' isolation was complete. He was separated from other people and, more starkly, even from the Father Himself (Matthew 27:41-46). “And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12). Alone and rejected, he won for us the ultimate victory.

R&D Think about a time when you felt lonely and rejected. Although any incident of that nature in our lives would be miniscule compared to what Jesus went through, it can at least give us a partial picture of Jesus' suffering.

Prayer: Your love, Lord, is beyond our imagining. Thank You.

Day 17

Read: Isaiah 53:4-12

Pierced for Our Transgressions

God, in His perfect timing, was trying to prepare the Jewish people for the coming of a Messiah who would be very different from the person they (or we) would have created in their own imagination. They had lived under a sacrificial system in which lambs were slain for their sins, yet their minds seemed unable to comprehend God's chosen servant as that lamb. So God, through this prophecy, is trying to paint a graphic picture of what was to come; and Jesus would undoubtedly have been making the connection between this prophecy and himself to the pair with whom he was revealing the Messiah from Scripture.

This is a servant who suffers in accordance with God's will. He was "stricken by God" (v.4) because of the sins of others (v.6). Note the reference here to sheep who had gone astray, recalling our study of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (v.10). In his suffering the servant is obeying the Father in every way. Jesus lived with the understanding that this was the way he would be expected to go. Time and again he predicted his death (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). "No prophet can die outside Jerusalem," he said (Luke 13:33), as he set his face toward Jerusalem and his ultimate destiny on earth.

This is the servant who suffers as a sin-bearer. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities" (v.5). The Messiah's very life is as a sin offering (v.10). "He bore the sins of many" (v.12). Miraculously, this man's suffering redeems *us* from our iniquities; he bears the penalty for *our* sins. Jesus had said that the Son of Man came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:5). Jesus' suffering and death was God's final answer for the sin of the world. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our sins are so reprehensible and our separation from the Father so great that there was no other solution. Thus, God in Christ took the initiative and God in Christ paid the penalty for our sins that we might be reconciled to the Father.

R&D When have you felt most separated from God? When have you felt closest to Him?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, may we never contemplate the cross without seeing, in it, your redeeming love.

Day 18

Read: Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-30

The Spirit of the Lord

Surely today's passage in Isaiah is one Jesus would have discussed with the two on the road to Emmaus as he opened to them what had been said in Scripture concerning himself (Luke 24:27). The reason we can be confident of this is that Jesus had referred to Isaiah's word as telling of himself in the Luke passage we read for today. Jesus specifically applied the prophecy to himself when he was among his own people in Nazareth.

On that occasion very early in Jesus' ministry he was in the synagogue on the Sabbath and read the Isaiah passage from the scroll. After he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant he sat down and began to teach. He began by saying, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v.21). The people were amazed because they knew him simply as Joseph the carpenter's son. Perceiving that what he was telling them was more than they could accept, he used the "prophet without honor in his hometown" statement on them and then took things a step further. He points out that God sometimes reaches out to the Gentiles rather than the Jews, and this inflames

the people. The fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy, and the Messiah who is to do it, has a much bigger plan than the inward looking Israelites.

The Isaiah passage tells of a Messiah who is Spirit-filled. He is empowered to teach, heal, and set people free. The prophecy and Jesus' use of it point back to Leviticus 25 and the Year of Jubilee, a time when the Israelites were to cancel debts, free slaves, and restore to people their ancestral property. Jesus comes to purchase an even greater freedom: from sin (Romans 6:18), from death (1 Corinthians 15:54-56), and from the power of evil (Romans 16:20). The Church down through the ages has seen Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

R&D In what ways has Jesus freed you? Explain with examples.

Prayer: A poem easy to remember: Jesus frees us.

Day 19

Read: Malachi 3:1-5

The Messengers

If we get a phone call late at night or in the very early hours of the morning, perhaps our hope is that it is what my wife and I call "wrong distance." Otherwise, the concern is that some disaster has occurred in the family. If not a disaster, then why the call at such a time? If it is a loved one on the other end of the line, we know an emergency is at hand.

Such is the case in our reading for today. Malachi is issuing a dire warning. He is telling the people that two messengers are on the way. One will give the call toward preparing for the arrival of the second: "prepare the way" (v.1). If Jesus used this passage in his "Bible study" on the road to Emmaus, he would have noted that this first messenger was John the Baptist. John came preaching repentance in preparing the way for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12) in fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy and Isaiah 40:3: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

The second messenger is Jesus. John's role is to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah in preparation for all that is to follow (Matthew 3:11-17). He asserted that "after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor, gathering wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (vv.11-12). These words certainly sound like what Malachi was prophesying in our reading for today. We, on the other side of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, tend not to think of him in such harsh terms. We choose to quote John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." In doing so, perhaps we don't give enough thought to "shall not perish," indicating that some certainly will.

R&D Reflect on the words of Malachi and John the Baptist in describing the Messiah. How do you reconcile these words with the Jesus you know?

Prayer: Lord, give us a heart for those who do not know You that we may help them learn of you so they will not perish.

Day 20

Read: Psalm 22:1-21; Matthew 27:45-46

Abandoned

As we know from the Matthew passage, Jesus quoted the first line from Psalm 22 from the cross just before his death (27:50). One would think, then, that this psalm would have been one of the references Jesus would have made in his discussion with the pair on the road. Perhaps he would have explained, as Bible scholars have pointed out in subsequent years, that his words from the cross expressed the deep anguish he was experiencing in taking upon himself the sins of the world while, at the same time, feeling separated from the Father. This is the very thing Jesus dreaded as he prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup would be taken from him (Matthew 26:39). The physical pain must have been overwhelming, but much greater was the sense of separation from the Father.

But, there is more to be seen in Psalm 22. It also prophesies the nature of the Messiah's death. In this psalm, King David, to whom the psalm is attributed, gave an amazingly accurate description of how the Messiah would suffer. David was obviously enduring great suffering himself as he penned these inspired words.

In the psalm we again hear words like "scorned by men and despised by the people" (v.6), and those who "mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him'" (vv.7-8). We also find "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint" (v.14), "they have pierced my hands and my feet" (v.16b), and "they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" (v.18). All of these things were fulfilled in Jesus' passion and crucifixion. They paint a picture of utter desperation, and it all happened to the promised Messiah, Jesus.

The essential thing to remember is that while Jesus felt separated from God, it was to God he appealed. It is a clear reminder to each of us that, no matter how distant we may feel from God during any crisis in our own life, God loves us and is there for us regardless of what our feelings may be.

R&D Reflect on a time when you felt separated from God, but continued to pray. What happened?

Prayer: Thank You, Father, that You are always there for us, no matter how "separated" we may feel.

Day 21

Read: Psalm 69:1-28

Enemies without Cause

As we continue to consider how Jesus might have shown that Scripture had always anticipated a Messiah who had to suffer and die for the people, Psalm 69 is worth consideration. It is one of the most quoted psalms in the New Testament, often because of the parallels between it and the suffering of Jesus.

In John 15:18-25, Jesus talked with his disciples about how the world would regard them because they were followers of his: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (v.20b). Then he says, "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason'" (v.25), quoting from Psalm 69:4. In John 7:5, we are told, "For even his own brothers did not believe him"; while Psalm 69:8 says, "I am a stranger to my brothers."

When Jesus cleared the Temple of the moneychangers (John 2:14-17), his disciples are said to have remembered “Zeal for your house will consume me” (Psalm 69:9a). And Paul, in his teaching in Romans 15 about the strong needing to bear the failings of the weak, points out that Jesus did not seek to protect his own interests (he came to do the Father’s will, not his own), quoting: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me” from 69:9b. Mark 15:23 tells us of Jesus on the cross being offered wine mixed with myrrh, which he refused, reminding us of 69:21. In Acts 1:18-20, Luke writes about what happened to Judas Iscariot, and gives us a slight variation from 69:25: “May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it.”

Once again we see the parallels between prophecies related to the Messiah and the fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

R&D We are now halfway through Lent. Reflect on how this Lent is going for you. As we journey with Jesus and the two on the road to Emmaus, how is your journey going?

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep a faithful Lent.

Day 22

Read: Psalm 110

“Sit at My Right Hand”

Psalm 110 is another of the most-quoted psalms in the New Testament because of its clear references to the Messiah, and therefore one we should consider as a possible part of “Jesus’ Bible study.”

Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (Matthew 22:41). When they replied, “The son of David,” Jesus asked, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’?” and then quoted Psalm 110:1. He goes on to ask, “If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” The Pharisees had no reply to that and it is said that “from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46).

It is in the Revelation that there are most often references back to our psalm for today. Verses 1 and 6 look toward Jesus’ final and complete destruction of the wicked as spelled out in Revelation chapters 6-9. Christ’s reign on earth (Revelation 20:1-7) is foreseen in 110:2. The final battle on earth in which Christ will finally overcome all the forces of evil (Revelation 19:11-21) may be seen in 110:5-6. And 110:4, “You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek,” is quoted in Hebrews 5:6 and 7:17.

As noted above, Jesus used this psalm to show that the Messiah is someone greater than David, Israel’s greatest king (see also Mark 12:35-37). Peter, in Acts 2:32-35, used this psalm to point out that Jesus sits on the right hand of God. Jesus is one who came to save and to reign. He was not just a good teacher, strong leader, and miracle worker, he is Lord.

R&D What does it mean to you that Jesus is both Savior and Lord?

Prayer: Lord, help me never to take for granted all You have done for me and for everyone else on this planet.

Day 23

Read: Jeremiah 31:31-34

A New Covenant

As our theoretical “Jesus’ Bible study” nears an end, we look at the passage from Jeremiah that prophesies the new covenant that would be inaugurated by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah.

The religious definition of a covenant would be that it is a relationship initiated by God to which a body of people responds by faith. God made covenants with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14), with the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:3-6), and with King David (1 Samuel 7:5-16). In our reading for today, however, we learn of a new covenant that God intends to make with His people. “‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah’” (v.31). This will not be like the covenant made with their forefathers “because they broke my covenant.”

The new covenant will be different in three ways. First, it will be a matter of the heart, not simply one of outward observance. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts” (v.33). This is a covenant of transformation from within. Secondly, the new covenant will lead the people into a personal relationship with the Lord. “No longer will they teach their neighbors, or say to another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (v.34). It would no longer seem that access to God had to be through the religious leaders or the sacrificial system; they would have direct access to the Living God. Thirdly, the new covenant would provide a way to remove the curse of sin forever. “For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sin no more” (v.34b).

The Letter to the Hebrews teaches that this new covenant has been fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (8:7-13). Transformation of the heart (Romans 8:11), a personal relationship with God (Philippians 3:10-11), and complete forgiveness (1 Timothy 1:15) are foundational to the Christian life.

R&D How is a covenant different from a contract? Do you see marriage as a covenantal relationship? Explain.

Prayer: Lord, You open the door to our hearts, give us access to Yourself, and forgive our sins. We are eternally grateful.

Day 24

Read: Zechariah 9:9-11

The Coming King

We come now to the final Old Testament passage we will consider as a part of those portions of Scripture Jesus might have used to show how the Jewish people should have recognized him as the long promised Messiah. Verse 9 is the one often read in churches on what we call Palm Sunday. For Christians, it predicted Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11) more than 500 years before it actually happened. As with other Scripture passages we have read, it envisions not a warrior-king on a mighty stallion, but a humble man bringing righteousness and salvation on the back of a donkey!

For those of us who remember our dreams, we can attest to the fact that scenes can change very quickly and sometimes without much sense of logic. Apparently prophecies can operate in a similar fashion, because there is a major shift between verses 9 and 10 of our reading. While verse

9 clearly had to do with the Messiah's first coming, verse 10 seems to speak to Jesus' second coming. At that time all nations will be subject to Christ, and his reign will reach the ends of the earth. In Philippians 2:9-10, Paul says that, at that time, every knee will bow to Christ and every tongue will confess him as Lord.

Verse 11 then refers to the covenant between God and His people. In Old Testament times, covenants were sealed or confirmed with blood. The old Abrahamic covenant was sealed by a blood sacrifice of animals (Genesis 15:1-20). This foreshadowed the blood sacrifice that Jesus would make on behalf of us all, giving us the new covenant. By virtue of this covenant, we have been freed from the prison of our sinful ways.

R&D What other passages of Scripture can you think of (not covered over the last 14 studies) that prophesied Jesus as the Messiah?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for freeing me from the "waterless pit" of my self-centered life.

Day 25

Read: John 14:1-17

"Stay with Us"

As Jesus completed his Bible study with the two, they were approaching the village of Emmaus. Not wanting him to depart from them, they urged Jesus, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over" (Luke 24:29). Although they still did not recognize that their visitor on the way was Jesus, they surely sensed something about him (see Luke 24:32) that caused them to want him to remain with them. This "stay with us" feeling is common to us all when we have been with someone with whom we have forged a new relationship or when we have felt especially close to the Lord.

A similar feeling must have existed among the disciples in our reading for today. Jesus had told them, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer" (John 13:33). To deal with that, Jesus tried to make clear the pathway that lay ahead for him and for them. At a time when his followers would be experiencing a natural discomfort, Jesus gives them some very comforting promises.

He begins by asking for trust: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (v.1). It is only in a condition of trust that we can be fully comforted. Jesus tells them that he is going before them (into heaven) to prepare a place for them so that they can be with him eternally. Thomas questions where Jesus is going and how they are to know the way. At this point Jesus makes one of the most important statements in all of Scripture: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (v.6). Jesus didn't promise to show them the way, he makes it clear that he *is* the way. Jesus is the path to heaven.

Jesus goes on to help his disciples realize that knowing him is knowing the Father, that he and the Father are one. He tells them that they will do greater things than he has done. That was not an indication that anyone would ever personally equal Jesus in his healings and other miracles, but that the ever-growing Church down through the ages would perform these "greater works." Jesus then concludes by telling them about the power of prayer in his name. Although he would be gone from them, Jesus was making it abundantly clear that they were not being abandoned. Nor are we.

R&D When have you most recently wanted someone to "stay with us"?

Prayer: *O Lord Jesus Christ, you have said that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Suffer us not to stray from you, who are the way, not to distrust you, who are the truth, not to rest in anything other than you, who are the life.* (Erasmus)

Day 26

Read: Luke 22:14-20

Broken Bread

As Jesus sat at table with the two in Emmaus, he gave thanks and broke the bread (Luke 24:30). What a privilege that was for this pair! Although this was not technically a celebration of Holy Communion, it was the next thing to it and the first time anything like that had happened since our reading for today. How Cleopas and his companion must have meditated on that event for the rest of their lives.

In today's reading we have the Last Supper. Jesus had made careful arrangements for this last meal with his disciples. It was Passover, which commemorated Israel's escape from Egypt, a monumental event in the life of the Jewish people. It represented the deliverance of God's people from slavery, and the beginning of their journey toward the Promised Land. This Passover meal would signal the time that was coming in which God's people would be delivered from the slavery of sin and death, and begin their journey into the Kingdom of God.

This was a new Passover to commemorate a new covenant. The bread is Jesus' body, the wine his blood, poured out as a sacrifice for all. This is an event to be continued in remembrance of him. It is what we do when we celebrate Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. We remember Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. He is present to us in a special way whenever we do this. As we feed on him, we are sustained as we journey through the challenges and trials of our lives toward the glory of the life that is to come.

R&D *What, for you, is the significance of coming to the Lord's Table in remembrance of him?*

Prayer: *Sustain us, Lord, by the infilling of Your Spirit that we may be Your people in the world around us.*

Day 27

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

"This Is My Body"

Because of the importance of the Lord's Supper, particularly during the Lenten Season, let's spend another day looking at it. Today's reading reveals the Apostle Paul's insights into this important event. The background for his teaching on the subject has to do with the abuses of worship that seemed to be happening in the Corinthian church. He had given instructions about propriety in worship earlier in the chapter (vv.2-16), and now he deals specifically with Holy Communion.

When the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the early church, it included a fellowship meal followed by the celebration of Communion. The fellowship meal was designed to encourage unity in Christ. The gathering place would normally have been in a home, and homes were very small in those days compared to what we have today. Thus, members of the faith community would not have been able to gather in the same room. It appears that the tendency was for the more prominent members to gather in the dining area and for the less fortunate to make do in other parts of the

house with little or nothing to eat. It was a reprehensible situation; the celebration of unity had become a display of pagan selfishness. Paul minces no words in speaking to the situation.

He then deals specifically with Holy Communion. Although Paul had not been present at the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus had obviously revealed to him that this event was to be commemorated and how it was to be done. Jesus intended the Lord's Supper to be a threefold expression of his complete commitment to us, our total commitment to him, and our corresponding commitment to one another in the body of Christ. This was a serious occasion, not just a casual matter. Not taking it seriously could bring down the severe judgment of God, even death (v.30).

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a great privilege. It is a place where heaven and earth meet, where God and His Church come together in a precious and holy moment.

R&D What might you need to do to more faithfully prepare for Holy Communion?

Prayer: Lord, help me never to be casual, rude, or unthinking in my worship of You.

Day 28

Read: John 20:10-18

Their Eyes Were Opened

It was as Jesus broke the bread that the two from Emmaus' eyes were opened and they realized that their guest was Jesus (Luke 24:31). There are a number of significant places in Scripture when people's eyes were opened to God. The theologian Arthur A. Vogel said this: "Without God's presence, there is no Christianity, for Christianity is a person-to-person relation with God. God is a Person who made us persons so we could experience His presence. The personal presence of God is the first beginning and the first purpose of everything for the Christian."

In our reading for today, we have the incident of Mary Magdalene experiencing the presence of Jesus in his resurrected body. At first she did not recognize him. When he saw her crying outside the tomb and spoke to her, she thought he was the gardener. But there was something about the way he then said, "Mary," that she knew him. There had certainly been evidence that Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:1-12), but belief only came when Jesus spoke Mary's name.

The Apostle Paul had certainly heard evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, but he did not believe until Jesus encountered him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19a). It actually was a blinding experience for him that required Ananias to come and pray for him three days later. When he did, Paul's eyes were opened in more ways than one! Paul and Silas were in jail in Philippi singing and giving glory to God when an earthquake occurred that sent the jailer to his knees before them, begging to be saved. Those events certainly opened his eyes to the Lord (Acts 16:29-30). Likewise, the centurion Cornelius' eyes were opened by a series of events in Acts 10.

What a joy it is to see a person's eyes opened to Jesus. So it was for Cleopas and his companion when Jesus broke the bread.

R&D When did you have your "eye-opening" experience of the Lord? Explain.

Prayer: Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the bread.

Day 29

Read: Acts 8:26-40

Their Hearts Were Warmed

As our Emmaus pair recall, as Jesus had walked with them on the road and opened Scripture to them, their hearts had been strangely warmed (Luke 24:32). This was basically the same expression John Wesley used in describing his own conversion. In the book *Passing the Flame*, it is said of the preeminent theologian of the early Church, Augustine of Hippo, “The final turning point in his conversion was hearing the reading of Romans 13:13-14 in a garden in Milan; and what had penetrated Augustine’s great mind finally reached his heart.”

In our reading for today, we see a similar instance of this phenomenon in the Acts of the Apostles. Philip was one of the deacons of the infant Christian Church. Led by the Holy Spirit, he was on mission for the Lord. He is sent to an encounter with an official of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is south of Egypt, so the man had traveled a long way to worship in Jerusalem. This shows the dedication he had to God. The Jews had had contact with Ethiopia (known as Cush) from ancient times (Psalm 68:31, Jeremiah 38:7). Because he was a person of importance in his country, reaching him for Christ could be quite an accomplishment.

Like our travelers on the road to Emmaus, the Ethiopian needed a Bible study from the Old Testament to lead him into an understanding of the divinity of Christ. Using a passage from Isaiah that we have earlier studied, which the eunuch “just happened” to be reading, Philip was able to show him how the prophecies of Scripture pointed to Jesus as the long promised Messiah. Although we don’t find these words in our reading, the eunuch’s heart was undoubtedly strangely warmed. He accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior and wanted, immediately, to be baptized.

The power of Scripture to reach people in this way is common in our day as well.

R&D Recall a time when your heart was strangely warmed by Scripture. Explain.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that You can speak to us so clearly and effectively through the Bible.

Day 30

Read: Luke 19:1-10

They Returned to Jerusalem

Our Emmaus pair realize that they have encountered the risen Jesus. The night had come and they are tired from the day-long journey. “They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem” (Luke 24:33). It is amazing what people can do when they have been empowered by the love of Jesus. Perhaps we can recall instances in our own lives when we have accomplished things we never believed possible of ourselves, only to realize that it wasn’t ourselves but the Lord, through His Holy Spirit, working within us. Yet, the experiences we may have had couldn’t touch the enthusiasm (a word which means inspired by God) that would have motivated these two.

Just as our Emmaus story tells of a physical turnaround, our reading for today describes one of the great spiritual turnarounds in the Bible. There is a freshness about the Zacchaeus story that makes it particularly appealing. It not only tells us a lot about Jesus and about human nature, but there is a special message in it for us all.

Zacchaeus obviously had some interest in Jesus. Why else would a person of wealth climb a tree just to see Jesus passing by? The eagerness of Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus also indicates that more than idle curiosity was involved.

We will never know whether it was some spiritual perception, some foreknowledge of Zacchaeus, or just the sight of the tiny man up in a tree that drew Jesus' attention. In any event, Jesus spoke first, calling Zacchaeus by name and making an arrangement that Zacchaeus himself would never have dared suggest. Zacchaeus had taken the first step by climbing the tree and Jesus was quick to meet him more than halfway. All that was needed to bring Zacchaeus to repentance and the beginning of a new life was the graciousness of Jesus in showing friendship. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and his appointment with death; he would never pass that way again. For Zacchaeus, it was now or never. How about our neighbors, friends and loved ones who do not know Jesus?

R&D *Who might be the Zacchaeus in my life? What will I do?*

Prayer: *Lord, give me the sensitivity to show friendship to those I meet along the way that I might, perchance, be given an opportunity to tell them about You.*

Day 31

Read: Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4

They Were Assembled Together

When Cleopas and his companion returned to Jerusalem, they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together (Luke 24:33b). As we see from our passages for today, this would be a pattern for the disciples following their 40 days with the resurrected Lord.

After Jesus was taken up into heaven, the disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem and had a prayer meeting. Jesus had said they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days, so they waited and prayed. Their prayer time would have included praise and worship, combined with prayer and supplication. The participants were opening themselves to the will of God in anticipation of receiving the Holy Spirit. They exhibited obedience (they were doing exactly what Jesus had told them to do), persistence (continuing to pray for ten days), and unity ("all joined together" v.4). It is interesting to note: that there were among them Jesus' brothers (who had once disbelieved but were now converts), women were prominent in the infancy of the Christian Church, and Jesus' mother is mentioned for the last time in Scripture.

The result of this faithfulness was the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon this prayer group in wind and fire. In John 3:8, Jesus had described the Holy Spirit as wind blowing "wherever it pleases," and the Old Testament contains many illustrations of fire as representations of God's power, presence, and holiness.

Amazing things still happen today when "two or three are gathered together" in Jesus' name (Matthew 18:20). Prayer groups can be the backbone of the Church, where devoted members do just what the prayer group in our passages did: pray obediently, persistently, and in unity.

R&D *Are you in a prayer group? Why or why not?*

Prayer: *Lord, teach us to pray.*

Day 32

Read: Luke 24:36-43

He Has Risen!

Today we look at the passage of Scripture immediately following the Road to Emmaus story. As the two arrive back among Jesus' followers, they hear the confirming words, "It is true! The Lord is risen and has appeared to Simon" (v.34); and then the two tell their story of being with Jesus on the road (v.35).

"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be to you'" (v.36). The natural reaction of the disciples was anything but peace. They were terrified as though they had seen a ghost. Thus, Jesus had to convince them of the reality of his resurrection. He showed them his hands and feet, still bearing the marks of his crucifixion. He asked them to touch him to prove that he was really there. Then he ate some boiled fish to demonstrate his physical presence. He wanted to be sure there was no doubt. He had risen.

Philip Yancey summed it up in a poignant way when he wrote, "In some respects I find an unresurrected Jesus easier to accept. Easter makes him dangerous. Because of Easter I have to listen to his extravagant claims and can no longer pick and choose from his sayings. Moreover, Easter means he must be loose out there somewhere. Like the disciples, I never know where Jesus might turn up, how he might speak to me, what he might ask of me. As Frederick Buechner says, Easter means 'we can never nail him down, not even if the nails we use are real and the thing we nail him to is a cross.'"

R&D Reflect on the difference that Jesus' resurrection makes to the world, forever.

Prayer: The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed.

Day 33

Read: Luke 24:44-49

"You Are My Witnesses"

Now Cleopas and his companion are right there with Jesus and the disciples to hear what he has to tell them.

The first thing he does is a Bible study like the one he had done with the pair on the road. He opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures and how all that had been prophesied had been fulfilled in him. "This is what is written," he tells them. "The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (vv.46-47). In this way, Jesus was explaining to them the significance of his life, death, and resurrection so that they would be able to share the Good News with others. Jesus had accomplished what was expected of him, and now others must carry the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the world. "You are my witnesses," he tells them.

These followers of Jesus were to be the Christ-bearers to others, beginning in Jerusalem. However, they were not yet prepared for the task. They needed to be "clothed with power from on high" because, in their own strength, they would fail. The task was too great for human beings to accomplish on their own. They were to receive what the "Father had promised," the gift of the Holy Spirit. It would be through the Spirit that they could convince the world of the truth spoken by these followers of Jesus, and the Spirit would bring to conversion those who responded in faith.

We who call ourselves Christians today could not have attained faith if it had not been for faithful witnesses. Now we are the ones to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry the message to those who come within the scope of our influence.

R&D To what extent have you been a witness for Christ? How might you be more so in the days and years ahead?

Prayer: Lord, empower me by Your Holy Spirit to speak Your word as opportunities present themselves, now and always.

Day 34

Read: Luke 24:13-16

Jesus' Hidden Presence

With today's reading, we begin to reflect on what we have read in this study and some conclusions we might reach as a result. Jesus was walking along with the pair on the road to Emmaus but they did not recognize him. He was with them, but it was in the nature of a hidden presence. The same was true in John 20:14 when the risen Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene but she did not recognize him, and in John 21:4 when he was on the shore and the disciples in the boat did not realize it was Jesus.

The experience of Jesus' hidden presence is perhaps common to us all. The ministry of Mother Teresa of Calcutta was so effective because she saw, in all the sick and dying to whom she ministered, the hidden presence of Jesus. In his Parable of the Last Judgment Jesus said, "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 25:40). Our Lord Jesus wants us to be looking for his hidden presence in the people and circumstances that we encounter in the natural course of our daily lives.

But there is another facet of our lives as Christians having to do with Jesus' hidden presence. It is when we feel separated from him, when our prayers seem to be bouncing off the ceiling, and we sense no relief from the troubles we are in. We may remind ourselves that Jesus loves us and promises to be with us, but where is he? We know God is with us through His indwelling Holy Spirit and within the body of Christ, the community of faith of which we are a part, but it sometimes doesn't seem like it.

Henry T. Blackaby said this: "You can respond to the silence of God in two ways. One response is for you to go into depression, a sense of guilt, and self-condemnation. The other response is to have an expectation that God is about to bring you into a deeper knowledge of Himself." Needless to say, the latter is better.

R&D Discuss a situation in which you found the "hidden presence" of God in another person.

Prayer: Lord, help me to learn and grow from my experiences of perceived separation from You.

Day 35

Read: Luke 24:32

Jesus' Felt Presence

Cleopas and his fellow traveler are able to recall the warm feelings they had from being with Jesus and having him open the Scriptures to them even though they had not known him at the time. Fortunately, these experiences can also be an ongoing part of our process of growing in

Christ. Sometimes we can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, guiding us and challenging us. This is normal, and something for which we can be very grateful.

It is certainly a common experience of Christians to feel God's presence in the reading and study of Scripture. When a particular passage speaks directly to our heart concerning some issue on our mind, we can get that warm glow of understanding that is a gift of God. Sometimes the words of Scripture will literally "jump off the page" as we seek the Lord's guidance. When we are "down" and need spiritual uplifting, the reading of a psalm or other beautiful passage of Scripture can warm our hearts, lift our spirits, and remind us of God's love.

Of course, prayer can open the door to the felt presence of God. People who practice meditation and contemplation do so because it brings them into the felt presence of God. That is largely what those prayer experiences are all about. But even our simple prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and petition can connect us with God in such a way that we perceive His presence with us. Paul Bunyan said, "When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words than thy words without heart." Concerning the attitude with which we come to prayer, Father Andrew wrote: "Let us seek so to prepare our souls that the Lord entering may find a place prepared for him." And Larry Christenson said, "Prayer is not a pious exercise. It is doing serious and significant business with God." If our heart is in the right place, God can make His presence felt in prayer.

R&D Reflect on a recent experience of feeling the presence of God in your life.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that You meet us in so many ways on the road of life, if we have open hearts and minds to perceive Your presence.

Day 36

Read: Luke 24:30-31

Jesus' Revealed Presence

The two recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and then he was gone from them. Christians today sometimes experience *Shekinah* glory moments when Jesus breaks through to us in some remarkable way. We probably wouldn't be able to stand much of that, but it does happen from time to time. Moses had to shield his face after being with God when receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:29-35). His face was so radiant that the Israelites were afraid to come near him. The Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-13) would have been another instance of *Shekinah* glory in the Bible. This experience left Peter mystified.

The glory of God is well stated in this brief summary from the *Disciple's Study Bible*: "God is both transcendent and immanent. He towers over us as supreme Lord, and yet He is very close as He stoops down to make Himself known to us. In His sovereignty and holiness He is exalted far above us, but in His love He draws very near to us."

For some people, their conversion experience may have been a moment of the revealed presence of the Lord if it were particularly dramatic in nature or very deeply moving. For others, these "mountaintop" experiences may occur at Christian conferences or retreats when God breaks through in some astounding way. One of mine happened at a Christian coffee house when the words to a praise song gave me a strong sense that I was already living in eternity, something that had never occurred to me before, and literally brought me to my knees. God's glory is enough to cause us to fall on our knees in awe and praise; and, at the same time, it can be like a searchlight

exposing us for who we are in all our fallenness and filling us with a desire to become whole and clean.

R&D Recall an instance of facing the revealed presence of the Lord in your life. Sometimes, such experiences are almost impossible to explain.

Prayer: Lord, You are too awesome and glorious for words.

Day 37

Read: Acts 2:1-13

The Witness of the Holy Spirit

As we near completion of this pilgrimage through Lent, we have hopefully come closer to God. Drawing from an earlier commentary in *The Journey* written by Donald M. Hultstrand, let us consider the first of three special gifts of God—the first being the Holy Spirit—that we can rely on to strengthen us as we continue to grow toward spiritual maturity for the rest of our lives.

“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that came to rest on each of them” (v.3). Just as the fire of the Holy Spirit brings light to every dark corner of the world, so he penetrates every dark corner of our souls. The symbol of fire speaks to us very powerfully.

1. The fire warms. We all need warming. How devastating it is when people are cold to us. Conversely, when we are cold to others, they can feel the chill and their life is diminished. We fail God when we are lukewarm in our faith and fail to exhibit a Christ of joy and deep love to others. But the Holy Spirit transforms us into people who radiate warmth.
2. The fire spreads in every direction. No part of us is unaffected by the fire of the Holy Spirit. The fire of the Spirit spreads to our sight so we can see things differently as though through the eyes of Jesus. It spreads to our hearing so that we hear God speaking to us. It spreads to our movements so that we can act as Christ would act.
3. The fire refines us. It is not enough for us to become warm people, though God certainly wants us to be that way. Nor is it enough for us to be affected in every part of our being though, again, God wants that for us. More than that, like a refining fire, He wants to turn our dross into gold. He wants us totally transformed, remade in His image. This cannot come without dramatic change, and that cannot come easily. There are growing pains as we mature in the Spirit; but, thank God, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit to get us where God wants us to go.

R&D Can you see the Holy Spirit working in you in ways such as those mentioned above? Explain.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit; warm me, fill me, refine me.

Day 38

Read: Matthew 26:17-29

The Witness of Holy Communion

The second gift the Lord has given us to strengthen us as we grow toward spiritual maturity is the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion. It is especially significant to consider this gift on Maundy Thursday because this is the day that commemorates the Last Supper and therefore the institution of Holy Communion. Drawing from a previous commentary in *The Journey* written by John and Shirley MacNaughton, let us look at this second, spiritually sustaining gift.

Jesus was soon to die. When he was gone, he knew his followers would need something besides fading memories to recall him to their presence in a special way. Later generations of Christians would also need something concrete, something they could see and touch and feel to bring them into Jesus' nearer presence as well. So, at the Passover meal in the Upper Room, Jesus took bread and then wine, each time giving thanks and offering these substances as his body and blood. A new covenant was established, a covenant in blood for the forgiveness of sin. That night his disciples saw but a glimmer of what Jesus was doing. Later, they would remember and understand. Jesus was telling them, "When I am gone, eat this bread and drink this cup in remembrance of me, and there I will be in the midst of you."

We call it a sacrament, something we can see and touch and feel that signifies something we cannot see, touch, or feel. The bread and wine, eaten and drunk this way, were invested by Jesus to be a very special vehicle of his grace that we could experience every time we gathered in remembrance of him. Even before he died he was laying a foundation by which he could come alive again. We call it Holy Communion because it has become the way in which countless Christians have been able to come into union with the Holy One to be forgiven, nourished, comforted, and sustained.

R&D Explain in some detail what Holy Communion means to you.

Prayer: Heighten our devotion, O Lord Jesus, that, through the eyes of our faith, we may find you in these simple elements and take you more fully into our hearts.

Day 39

Read: Hebrews 4:12-13

The Witness of Scripture

The third sustaining gift we will look at is Holy Scripture. "Don't be deceived by the brevity of the reading today. It speaks volumes," wrote William C. Frey in an earlier commentary in *The Journey* that we will draw from today.

The Apostle Paul, describing to the Ephesian church the armor Christians wear when engaging in spiritual warfare, speaks of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). In Hebrews, the writer uses the same metaphor, but describes both the power and the activity of this sword. It is "living and active."

The words are more than words. The Bible has a life of its own. When we speak of the inspiration of Scripture, we mean not only that the biblical writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit but that the Spirit uses those same writings today to encounter, challenge, exhort, and bless God's people. "When I read the Bible," someone said, "it feels more like it is reading me." The word of God written has the power to lay bare the deepest secrets of the human heart and to transform ordinary moments into extraordinary opportunities for growth and change.

God's power through Scripture, however, is not to be confused with magic. The most effective way to appropriate the grace contained in the Bible is to ask for it, and to ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to receive the truth God wishes to give us.

By providing these three precious gifts—the Holy Spirit, Holy Communion, and Holy Scripture—God has provided ample resources to lead us toward the holiness He desires for each of us.

R&D Describe the ways in which you avail yourself of these three gifts.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to find You, and the special message You have for me, every time I read the Bible.*

Day 40

Read: Luke 24:13

Continuing the Walk

We have been on a journey of discovery together over these last 40 days. We have walked with this pair on their way to Emmaus and sought to learn all we could from their trip and everything, including the appearance of Jesus, they encountered along their way. We have dealt with the three elements of Jesus' presence in their lives and in ours. We have considered the three special gifts the Lord has given us to sustain us as we continue the walk.

Victor Oliver, who inspired this teaching, ended it by summing up what we can do when we are down. Our two travelers were surely down as they trudged home from Jerusalem and Jesus' crucifixion. As we saw in the story, however, they did certain things that brought them through their grief. It is instructive to look at how these same principles can apply to us when we are in painful circumstances.

First, they talked about the situation within their community of faith; the two shared their concerns as they walked on the way. Second, they dealt with reality; they faced the harshness and bitter disappointment head-on rather than trying to minimize or rationalize it. Third, they looked for the stranger in their midst; they didn't allow their grief to blind them to a fellow traveler along the way. Fourth, they were open to the possible needs of another and showed him hospitality. Fifth, they broke bread together in faith. It is a sound pattern for our own lives and for life within our community of faith.

Also, let us remember that every opportunity of being with another person is an opportunity to talk about Jesus. And, who knows? Maybe Jesus will suddenly be there with us.

R&D *What has been most helpful to you on this Lenten journey?*

Prayer: *Lord, sustain us on the journey of faith. Thank You for Your presence in us and with us each step of the way.*

by Harry C. Griffith

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