

## **How Will I Know? By the Way**

*A sermon preached on Luke 24:13-35 on April 27, 2025*

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In the late 1950's and early 1960's, there was a man named Bill in Western NC who found himself to be an up and coming thriving business man. The business had such great potential, that he asked his son, Bill Jr. to be part of it. Together they figured out the perfect combo to meet the needs of their local community and make pretty good money doing it. Some would have said they could have been put in the category of being really good scientists, or chemists even. The story is told that they took ingredients like - Corn, Sugar, and "branch" water, ya know, all the things - and mixed it together. From that, some said they ended up having the best moonshine of the south. There was only one problem - making your own moonshine was illegal. Eventually, the federal government got involved and Bill Sr. went to federal prison up in Virginia. His son, Bill Jr.'s punishment was a little different. The government decided to place Bill Jr. on a 3-year probation. There were several stipulations to that probation with one of those being that he had to take his family to church every Sunday for 3 years. So every Sunday morning, he walked....**down the road**...en route to church with his wife and three kids. The oldest of those three little kids, his son, ended up being baptized at that church and had found a place among the church people and came to know who Jesus was.. **That way on the road to church ended up becoming**

**that little boy's witness.**

At the same time, on the other side of town was a little girl. Her mom was often sick because it was, after all, the 1960's when medical world was a little different. This little girl wanted to go to church, and with no father in the picture and her mom unable to take her, it was her grandfather who agreed to take her hand and walk the mile...**down the road**... to church every Sunday where she came to know Jesus. **That way on that road became her witness.** Two sides of town, two different roads, two different faith communities, two different motivations for going to church, two different ways. These ways ultimately led to their transformation of learning about Jesus and coming to faith in God. This little girl holding the hand of her grandfather eager to go to church and that little boy following behind his father who begrudgingly went to church because of his probation from making moonshine, grew up and somehow found each other. They ultimately got married. Their names? Doug and Patty. They had two kids together. Their kids' names - Chris and Amy McClure.

**Patty and Doug's story - their way of their road and life together, led to transformation as a family and became our witness.**

In today's story, we have two travelers on the road together. As the dust clung to their sandals and the evening sun cast long shadows over the road to Emmaus, Cleopas walked beside a companion whose name history did not keep.

They moved with the slow steps of those weighed down by grief, speaking in hushed tones about the one they had followed—the one they had hoped would redeem Israel. Then a stranger joined them, his presence quiet but commanding, his questions cutting through their sorrow like light through fog. Together they walked down the road to Emmaus. A road that leads away from Jerusalem, Jerusalem being the place where they gathered for their most treasured festivals and times of fellowship, the place where they came to sacrifice and offer their very best to God, the place where they connected with their friends from all over, the place where they just welcomed their leader a week before with palm branches shouting “Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Lord!” Just days earlier they walked up the road **on the way** to Jerusalem - filled with excitement and hope. And yet, they are now walking **away** from this place - walking away from Jerusalem – not with spirits lifted and heads held high; not with a sense of renewed strength and energy; not with a sense of having just been in the presence of God; and certainly not with a sense of any kind of hope. They had no idea that **their way would become their witness to something bigger than themselves.**

It’s interesting because there are two of them, but only one of them is named. Cleopas. Did you notice that the other is never given a name in our passage? As you read this story and as we talk about it, perhaps it’s an invitation just to imagine yourself as the other traveler, walking this journey with Cleopas. Because we, too, are on the way - needing to know if resurrection is real, carrying

grief, disappointment, uncertainty, curiosity, questions. I can almost imagine this unnamed person in our passage today as someone who jumped all in as a follower of Jesus and felt a deep hurt and pain and just wanted to escape it all and walk away. I've heard people even here in our community talk about the deep church hurt they have experienced in their past. Where they show up and put so much trust in a faith community with a deep desire to serve and get involved, only to be met with deep disappointment and hurt and left standing there and then walking away thinking "where is Jesus in all of this?" (Pope story?) Why am I not accepted and loved for who I am? Even in those moments, we often have no idea that **our way on that journey is becoming our witness to something much bigger than we can imagine.**

For these two travelers, walking this road lasted only for a day. But for some of us, walking this road doesn't just last a day. It lasts for a few days, a few weeks, or perhaps even years. For some they walk the road and keep asking the question "where is the living God in the midst of all of that is happening in my life?" Cleopas and his companion had already forgotten, or perhaps put in the back of their minds, the promises found in Scripture about Jesus and how he would return in 3 days. The events they had just experienced in Jerusalem caused them to quickly forget God's promises. It only took 3 days for them to get off track and lose sight of what they had studied for years in Scripture. And yet, Jesus was there

with them on the road and journeyed with them, reminding them again of the words of scripture and going on to sit with them to their home for table fellowship. And it was here in the breaking of bread around that table in their house that their hearts and minds were transformed to experience the living God. Early Christians, when talking about resurrection, had a different meaning beyond revival of a corpse. They referred to resurrection as transformation. So the two on the way to Emmaus - their mind and heart were experiencing resurrection - they were being transformed. **The way - all the way to their home to sit around the table - was becoming their witness. But it didn't stop there.**

Following the recognition of Jesus, they made their way back to town - eager to give witness to their experience on the way to Emmaus. Now, imagine these two disciples busting up in that space in Jerusalem with something to say and everyone in the room sitting there, perhaps panicked and eager as they looked at them like “what?? What is it? What have you just experienced??” This past week, we have watched as the world mourned the death of Pope Francis. I’ve learned more about his life and the way he approached his work as news stations are reporting all kinds of things from his ministry. The most powerful thing I learned this week was learning about the day he became the pope. It was tradition and custom that when one was chosen to be the pope, he would come out to the people, standing on the balcony, and give a blessing to the people. But not Pope Francis. He was chosen as the pope on March 13, 2013 and proceeded to go out on the

balcony of St. Peter's Basilica just as every other pope had done. He begins to speak and the people prepare themselves to receive his first blessing. But something strange happened. He then proceeds to say that before he gives a blessing, he would like the people to give him a blessing first. He became like them - an equal. **His way of leadership became his witness** that God was not just with the pope or religious leaders, God was with and in everyone, no matter who they were or where they came from.

So these two disciples sat with those in their community, describing their whole story as those sat eager to hear what they had to say. Those around them listened, supported them, validated them, wondered with them, some asking good questions and feeling the freedom to express their own doubts and struggles. I bet the women were thinking "we tried to tell y'all! You should have listened to us the first time!" This was like a really interesting small group time and people might have said we've never heard this in Sunday school before! But these two travelers shared a really bold statement that they knew Jesus was alive because of how he showed up in the breaking of bread. They recognized him in the every day practice of eating together. They shared how Jesus was with them in the way of the ordinary, everyday ritual. **The way in community shone a light on the resurrected Jesus.** Just as we saw this morning with Lorelei's baptism, we experience Jesus more fully when in community together.

## **The way is communal**

About 9 years ago, way before I met Karen, I had the grand idea that I should probably freeze my eggs so that I would have some options of becoming a mother when the time was right. I made my appointment and anxiously waited in the doctor's office for my name to be called. The appointment started as normal as anyone else. Within just a minute of the ultrasound machine doing its thing, the doctor turned the machine off and said "okay, all done here, let's go chat in my office." Something felt off about how he said that. As we met, he was kind and gentle and met me on the way of my fertility journey. He then shared with me the hard news that I had no viable eggs. I would never be able to have biological children of my own. It was gut-wrenching, devastating, and I sat in the emotions that many other people have experienced - the emotions of infertility. My entire life I had dreamed of birthing my own children and imagined how those children would be raised in a loving and stable home and a supportive family. All of those dreams and expectations felt like they faded away in an instant. The hope I had was gone. The road I thought I was on now looked much different. Instead of a road of joy and life, it felt like a long and lonely road of grief. I found myself asking "where is God?" After all, I had been faithful. I was doing everything asked of me here at the church. I had followed God with every ounce of my being. I could visualize my life with kids, but my expectations were now shattered. After a while, I decided to share this with some trusted friends, family, and church

family as we sat together in homes and coffee shops - breaking bread together - and found that in the sharing of my story, my head lifted and I began to look up at those around me. It was in the sharing, in the hugs, in the table fellowship of sharing a meal that I found people looking at me and it was in those vulnerable moments that I realized it was the very presence of God looking back at me, hugging me, sitting at the table with me, walking the road with me. My eyes were opened that God was right there with me walking on the way. It was in the sharing of my vulnerabilities of the experiences on my road that I experienced God again, more alive than ever. It was then that I realized that the way was now leading to my witness of an ever-present God, whose presence was quiet and commanding, piercing through the darkness with the light. No matter your road, when you share in community you can't help but see the transforming impact of a resurrected Jesus - the one who transforms our very steps, the one who helps lift our chin to see the world more clearly, the one who reminds us who we are and to trust in the promises that he will never leave us nor forsake us, the one who reminds us that death never has the final word. There is power in being and sharing in community that leads to this hope. **The way in community is our witness.**

You wanna know how we will know resurrection has happened? We know by the way we intentionally look into the eyes and faces of others. We know by the way we speak to one another in love. We know by the way we welcome new life in this community and bless those who go on to minister in other places. We



know by the way we are honest and express our frustrations and doubts with each other. We know by the way we trust each other to hold our grief. We know by the way we create safe spaces for those who are uncertain of whether they will be welcomed because of their differences. We know by the way we share a meal together filled with laughter and conversations. We know by the way we share life together. We know by the way we can look back at any of our stories in our lives and realize that Jesus was right there with us even when we had no idea. How do we know Jesus is alive? Because he can be found every step of the way. **The way for each of us is our witness.** Amen.