



## ***Third Sunday of Easter, Apr. 19, 2026***

*Sermon, the Rev. Dr. David T. Gortner*

[Acts 2:14a,36-41](#)

[Psalms 116:1-3, 10-17](#)

[1 Peter 1:17-23](#)

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

Alleluia, Christ is risen!      *The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

Oh Risen Jesus, be near to us now and in all times, help us open ourselves to you who meets us on our journeys, and help us to see with new eyes the beauty of your resurrection and the hope and promise of new and everlasting life in you. *Amen.*

Good morning, everyone! God's blessings on this beautiful spring morning. Life is busting out all over, right? And today we come together in continuing bright celebration of Christ's resurrection and victory of death, in these joyful 50 days of Easter. And today we will welcome two young ones into the family of God, as God claims them in Baptism.

"Two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey..."

"They urged him, 'Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over.'..."

"They said to each other, 'Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road?'"

*(from Luke 24)*

This is one of the most beautiful of the encounters with Jesus after he arose from death that we read in the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. Two companions are walking together along a roadway, trying to make sense of what they have seen and experienced, talking with each other and going over the events that have broken their hearts, dashed their hopes, and then lit sparks of hope and wonder again. Everything they had experienced was unsettling, troubling, traumatizing! In their world where cruelty crashed down from the governing Empire with regularity, and where people in their own nation turned against each other, they had just seen their beloved teacher, Jesus, executed publicly, after one of his own followers betrayed him to religious leaders who had grown to hate him. Their world was already torn apart and turned upside down. And then, there was the matter of the empty tomb, and Jesus' body was gone – and a few folks claimed to have seen Jesus alive again, but this just didn't seem possible after the story had been so cruelly ended and the tomb had been closed like the ending of a book.

Easter is unsettling. Because Easter comes on the heels of all that unfolded before.

So, these friends walked and talked together, searching for ways to make sense of it all.

And then, someone joins them as they walk. They don't recognize this stranger. But this new person with them asks questions as they walk together. He shows curiosity and interest. He listens to their experience. He joins them on their journey – physically, and in their telling of the bigger journey of their lives. He then shares his own unique perspectives and insights into all that happened, from a larger frame.

Their hearts were already stirring, and they didn't want their time with this person to end. They asked him to stay, to linger. And then, as they shared a meal – and especially, in the sharing of bread that he broke, they saw that it was Jesus who was with them and had travelled this road with them.

I love what these companions said to each other next: “Weren't our hearts on fire?” Weren't we stirred to life? Didn't our hearts and minds and souls and bodies awaken and stir with energy?

John Wesley, the Anglican priest who ended up leading a Great Awakening and stirring of spiritual life that led to the birth of the Methodist Church, used a similar phrase to describe how a moment changed him. He said he reluctantly went to a meeting of people of Christian faith in Aldersgate. During this meeting, a man read from Martin Luther's commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans. Later, he wrote, “While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

I believe we all have had experiences like this in our lives. I believe we all have had encounters with God through other people, through the wonders of creation, through events that have happened, that have moved us powerfully, strangely, maybe suddenly or maybe slowly and quietly – but steadily and convincingly. I believe we all have had moments of conversion. I believe that Christ is among and within us all, opening doors and walking with us, hearing us and giving us new ways to see and understand, feeding us. And these things happen in our real, tangible, embodied lives.

Resurrection. There is an immediacy to it all. Knowing and recognizing the risen Christ is consistently a surprise, something that happens in the Now of living and remembering and believing and acting. Jesus is known and recognized in the midst of telling the stories, sharing food, acting in faith, and opening ourselves to wonder. “Oh, might it really be so?”

It is mystery. It is now. Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death. We do not know how it will be for us on that final day, in that moment of resurrection in the body, when the molecules reknit – but we do know that we will be like him – in the body, known as we are, clothed in power from on high for the sake of the life of the world. It is mystery. It is joy, and like the disciples we cannot apprehend it. Yet, in hoping, we move toward the purity and completeness and very solid presence that is what it means to be like him. And it is beginning in us even now – we are being raised into this new life and made into the likeness and fullness of Christ, cell by cell, thought by thought, molecule by molecule.

It begins today for Juliette and Benjamin. You, dear little ones, are baptized today into Christ's death and raised into Christ's resurrection and the new life of God's new creation.

Your journey will unfold all around you in your days and years ahead. How will you see and meet Christ on your journey, day by day? How will you open windows for others to see and meet Christ, through you, day by day?

It strikes me that THIS is the beginning of recognizing Jesus – when we open ourselves, honestly and completely, not just in our heady thoughts but in the heart and gut of what we have experienced. The travelers are open with Jesus. They do not hide. They invite Jesus to know their sorrow, their pain, their confusion, their excitement – and their deep love for the one they followed. They spoke of all of this from their love.

It is then as Jesus listens to them, invites their story, and welcomes their hearts as they speak, that another door opens. They have been heard. Now they are ready to hear Jesus open new ways of seeing and understanding all that has happened.

When have you had conversation with someone that has lifted you, held your attention completely, and kept you lingering for more?

The travelers' hearts were warmed powerfully as they walked and talked with this One who was there to listen, to accompany, and to invite them to see in new ways.

The bread we break and share every day is God's blessing and is a sign for us of God's sustaining presence. The water we wash in every day is the same as the water of our baptism, and is a sign each day of God's cleansing and healing and refreshing presence.

But we risk missing these signs all around us – those moments that really, really wake us up even in the ordinary things of life – if we have not opened ourselves, mind, heart, and gut, to ourselves and to God, and to others around us including the many others we meet along the way on our journey.

The doorway to knowing and being with Jesus begins with opening ourselves when Jesus approaches – the One whom we seek and serve in all persons, as we say we will do in our promises of baptism. Who knows what Christ will offer us through each person we encounter, if we can but open ourselves to share and exchange?

Christ is risen. You will meet Christ. Even in this time.

I shared with our families an image of what the day-by-day journey of faith can look like together. The image comes from my prompts to an AI image generator. I think it did pretty well! Here is the image, showing the ease of how we contribute to each other's spiritual growth by praying and meditating together, reading scripture together, talking with each other in our daily activities, and serving others.



We nurture each other and the people around us in these ways. We meet Christ in each other in these activities – and also in surprising places where we least expect to find resurrection and new life.

May our bodies, in the fullness of time, be that which Christ's body is – the habitation of God, given for others and for the life of the world. Now, in such a time as this, and always.