

THIRD SUNDAY IN EASTER:

April 19, 2026

This story of the disciples who are on the road to Emmaus is a very familiar one, at least for me. I have had different reactions to it over the years. This time around I find it to be a haunting story, yes haunting. Why do I say this? First of all, it is a very human, tender, real life event.

But then there is something mysterious, unreal, about it. Maybe the resurrection is the problem. It is a real, human event but yet something beyond our human experience.

Let's walk through it again. We first encounter two of the disciples, one of whom is later identified as Cleopas. It is clear that they were followers of Jesus. They are fleeing from Jerusalem. Were they fearful for themselves or just trying to leave behind the tragedy of their beloved leader's crucifixion? They were on the way to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. Why Emmaus? Was that their home? Or did it provide some kind of escape for them in their pain and grief? But they just can't leave what has occurred in the past. They can't let it go. They talk with each other about all the things that have happened.

So far so good. But then a stranger appears and begins to walk with them. Here is where the unexpected happens. This is Jesus but they do not recognize him. "Jesus himself came near..." the text says. This is really Jesus, or is it? Why don't they recognize him? He asks them what they are talking about. Then it says, "They stood still, looking sad". They are reacting to this stranger and sharing their grief. When provoked to explain what they have been discussing, they talk about the hope they had, and maybe still have. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." Then they add that some women of their group had visited the tomb, had told them the women had a vision of angels who said Jesus was alive. They admit that some, probably men, checked the tomb out, found it empty, and supposedly gave up expecting more.

I find I want to yell at them with Jesus, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets declared! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" I want to yell at them not because I want to upbraid them but because I feel their pain and want them to wake up to the consoling truth.

Jesus then gives them a scripture review, a liturgy of the Word, of how all of this followed a plan. The Word of God has been open to you but you did not pay attention. They will later remember that their hearts were burning within them as he talked with them, opening the scriptures for them.

As Jesus prepares to move on while they stop at an inn, they urge him strongly to stay with them because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over. He goes in with them; they sit down to eat. They recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

Let us once more walk through this story again. I am Cleopas. You are Cleopas. Do I recognize ever being lost in grief when a precious person to me in life, a dream or vision, or my very meaning and purpose died? Did I flee my crucifixion scene? Have I fled from my past or ran from my fears? Where or what was the Emmaus to which I wanted to flee? This story, my story, your story, is one of grief, confusion, absence, recognition and love. Did I ever feel my hope was destroyed? What lay within me that was a burning but cindering fire? How was it relit?

Easter does not bypass grief but passes through it. Our celebration of the breaking of the bread brings us back to hope, to life, to love. And, yes, I feel Easter is a haunting story.

Timothy J. Joyce, S.T.L., O.S.B.