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“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were open and they recognized him.” In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On that first Resurrection Sunday, Jesus in Luke’s Gospel account appears first to “the women who had come with him from Galilee,” three of whom are named in the text. When they see the empty tomb early that morning, they encounter two dazzling angels who proclaim Jesus’ resurrection. Immediately, they run back to the male disciples with the news. But the men, their sons, husbands, and friends, do not believe them, because to them it “seemed an idle tale.” An idle tale – or nonsense, gossip.

The Greek word used here, *léros*, was used sometimes to describe “delirious speech caused by fever or madness.” The male disciples decide that the women are delirious, their account of Resurrection impossible. Peter alone in Luke’s Gospel goes to the tomb, sees it empty but for the linen grave cloths, and leaves “amazed.”

Our story, often called “The Road to Emmaus,” begins, then, later that same day. We are told “two of them” are walking the 7 mile road back from Jerusalem where they and other Jews had traveled for Passover to a town called Emmaus. Who are these two? Only one is named – Cleopas – and he is not mentioned anywhere else. It would seem that these two are members of Jesus’ wider group of disciples – not one of the eleven, or Jesus’ inner circle.

As they walk along they are discussing everything that has happened that terrible week – when everything they thought they knew and understood had unravelled before their eyes. And as they talk, Jesus appears and walks alongside them. But we are told that they are “kept” from recognizing him. Is it God, Jesus himself, somehow keeping them from recognizing him? Does Jesus look different? Or are they kept from recognizing him because of their own grief, their own expectations for what is real, what is possible? The text does not tell us, only that they identify him as a “stranger” – a foreigner, or visitor to Jerusalem. Perhaps they understand him to be another Jewish pilgrim, which is why they are

shocked that he had not heard about their fellow Jew who was crucified just three days before. But we do not know. We only know that they do not recognize him. He is a stranger to them.

When Jesus plays dumb, they recount their own understanding of him and of the events of the last few days. Jesus, to them, is “a prophet,” one they “had hoped would redeem Israel.” The one they believed was the Messiah who would liberate Israel from Roman occupation.

Jesus replies by calling them foolish! They lack wisdom – they are slow to perceive reality – they have read the scriptures, Jesus, and the events of his death all wrong. And so on this walk, Jesus, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” interprets “the things about himself in all the scriptures.”

They arrive in Emmaus just as the sun is going down, and the two disciples feel moved to invite this stranger to stay with them, and Jesus agrees. And as they are sitting down to the evening meal, Jesus blesses, breaks, and gives them the bread. Their eyes open, and they finally recognize him. Is it because they have eaten so many meals with him – Jesus’ ministry did center around table fellowship and the sharing of food after all? The text does not tell us – but they now recognize Jesus, they see the Risen Lord in their midst, they perceive Reality for just a moment – and then he “vanishes.” “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?,” they say to each other. Our story ends with the two running back to Jerusalem “that very hour,” to share their news with the rest of the disciples.

As the two discover, the stories we tell ourselves influence our perception of Reality. They could not receive the women’s testimony because of their stories about women. They could not perceive Jesus as the Messiah because of their story, their interpretation, of the Scriptures. They could not recognize Jesus, even as he walked and talked with them, because of their story about who he was, his death, and so they saw him as a “stranger.” Although they believed Jesus was the Messiah while he was living, they have come up against their human limits. Our human presuppositions, our experiences and our personal and collective stories about them, shape our Reality.

Jesus knows this. And so he meets us on the road, he teaches us the Story, and he breaks bread with us. Like the two on that first Resurrection Sunday, we gather Sunday after Sunday to tell the Story, listening for God’s Word, for Jesus, in the Scriptures. Then, our hearts still burning with us, we gather to invite Jesus to join us at Table. We gather so that we might, if just for a moment, see our Risen Lord in the blessing and breaking of the bread. And then, with our eyes opened, our perception

restored, we return to the Road to live the Story. That we might recognize in the face of the stranger, our fellow traveler, Jesus himself. Amen.