

# “Christ Among the Pots and Pans”

Luke 24:13-35

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“Kitchen Maid at Emmaus,” *Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Valázquez*

It's easy to miss Emmaus.

At Easter, it's easy to miss the scripture we call “the Emmaus story.” If we had Sunday night church, we would hear this story every year because the lectionary suggests this text for Easter evening. And that makes perfect sense because Luke's text for what we call “the Emmaus story” follows immediately the story of the women at the tomb reporting all they had seen and heard to the disciples. “Later that same day” our text begins -- “later that same day” of resurrection.

And it's easy to miss the place we call “the village of Emmaus.” Today at least four villages, all of them no more than seven miles west of Jerusalem, claim to be *the* Emmaus. “This is Emmaus,” says one village. “No, *this* is Emmaus,” says another. Each claims to be the

holy ground where Jesus “stayed a little while” to break bread with his heartbroken followers before he vanished from their sight.

But who really knows where Emmaus is?

I remember riding from Jerusalem to Gaza with my friend Nancie Wingo and seeing a hand-lettered sign pointing to Emmaus. “Stop!” I told her, “We’re about to miss it.”

“*That’s* not the way to Emmaus,” she said. And we kept driving. Sure enough, soon I saw another sign marked “Emmaus.” But she wouldn’t turn toward that village. Then, farther down the road, a similar sign to another village -- she wouldn’t turn toward that “Emmaus” either. We were missing “Emmaus.”

Then, soon, a REAL sign -- government-issued green with white letters – but this one pointed toward Abu-Ghosh.

“We’ll eat lunch here,” Nancie said, swerving into the crowded parking lot of a magnificent church that looked rather like a fortress. “Besides the church,” she said, “Abu-Ghosh is known for its great hummus – and its hospitality – *and* its big statue of Elvis Presley.” Then, while she was locking the car, almost as an after-thought, she said, “It’s also known for being Emmaus.”

Who would have guessed?

Yes, it’s easy to miss Emmaus. Maybe the Crusaders had it right when they built the Church of Notre Dame in the Palestinian town now known as Abu-Ghosh. They thought this to be the site of the biblical Emmaus. Maybe it is. Maybe it isn’t.

No one can say: “This is *exactly* where the Easter evening meal happened and we have built a church here to preserve the event in fixed time and space forever.” No one can say, “Come and take pictures. Buy a postcard before you get back on the bus. Go home and tell your friends that you’ve been to the holy site of Emmaus.”

It would be easy to do all that and still miss Emmaus.

And maybe that's the point. Emmaus is one story, one experience we cannot lock in one time and one space. Quite the opposite: the Emmaus experience has birthed *many* stories and *many* experiences we cannot lock in time or space.

The Emmaus experience can be overwhelming, revealing, and life-transforming for us, as it was for the disciples in the gospel story. They leaned on Jesus' every word. So do we. They asked questions. So do we. When he interpreted scripture, they were able to understand the scriptures in a new way. So are we. But still, even with the Risen Lord walking beside them, the disciples almost missed him.

It's easy to miss Emmaus.

... easy to miss the stranger falling in step with us.

... easy to miss recognizing Christ in the unexpected conversation, the flash of insight, the dawning awareness that something is changing deep within.

... easy to miss what was once a nagging question being shaped into holy spiritual direction.

... easy to miss the chance to extend an invitation and then see the guest become the host.

... easy to miss the Presence of Christ walking with us through the darkness and into the light.

The disciples almost missed the full realization of who their Guest was until they recognized him in the ordinary act of breaking bread.

Since the meal at Emmaus, the disciples' experience has been interpreted in thousands of retellings, some in words, some in visual art.

A seventeenth century Spanish artist, Diego Valázquez, painted two pictures of the meal at Emmaus – one, conventional, almost predictable -- Jesus sitting at the table with Cleopas and his companion. In that painting Jesus has just broken the round, flat loaf of bread. The faces of the two disciples indicate their dawning recognition of him.

The other painting of Emmaus by Valázquez is quite different. This is the painting on the front of your worship bulletin.

The main figure is an African servant girl. She was an Islamic Moor in Valásquez Spain. The artist made the girl the center of the painting. She is handling the rich, gleaming serving vessels. The copper shines. Her left hand holds a porcelain wine pitcher. She is about to glance, or has been glancing, over her right shoulder.

For many years the outer edges of the painting were blackened. This painting, part of the collection of Valesquez's "kitchen pieces," showed only the girl at the kitchen table, tending to her tasks. For centuries, this was the only part of the canvas that was visible.

In 1933 the painting was cleaned. After the restoration, it revealed, in the top left corner, an opening in the wall behind the servant girl through which to pass food to those in the other room. Look through that opening and you can see three figures sitting at a table. In your print you likely can see only two, but in a larger, clearer print, you can see the hand of the third figure reaching toward Jesus in the middle.

The artist has caught the serving girl in the moment when she has paused from her cleaning and is about to look up to see the guest again. Something --- or Someone -- seems to have caught her attention.

Last week the painting caught *my* attention. I have glanced at it every year at this time in the liturgical cycle. But I might as well have been looking at the canvas still covered by centuries of grime. And this year I looked at it through a poem by Denise Levertov, who writes through the girl's perspective:

She listens, listens, holding  
her breath. Surely that voice  
is his the one  
who had looked at her, once, across the crowd,  
as no one ever had looked?  
Had seen her? Had spoken as if to her?

Surely those hands were his,  
taking the platter of bread from hers just now?  
Hands he'd laid on the dying and made them well?

Surely that face ?

The man they'd crucified for sedition and blasphemy.  
The man whose body disappeared from its tomb.  
The man it was rumored now some women had seen this  
morning, alive?

Those who had brought this stranger home to their table  
don't recognize yet with whom they sit.

But she in the kitchen, absently touching the winejug she's to take  
in,  
a young Black servant intently listening,

swings round and sees  
the light around him

and is sure.

Through the girl's eyes, the painter interprets Luke's words:  
"Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." And the

poet affirms her growing certainty: "Surely those hands were his" "Surely that face" She "is sure." She is sure she has seen the Lord.

Another writer who commented on this painting wonders if the young girl is looking at the reflection of Jesus in the white pottery vessel to her right.

When have you known the Risen Christ? When were your eyes opened? When did you recognize him?

Frederick Buechner writes: "The sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often the everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears reveal only . . . a gardener, a stranger coming down the road behind us, a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with all our being and imagination . . . what we may see is Jesus himself."

The poet has perhaps caught the essence of what the painter was saying: It is not just in the liturgical and the set-apart, but in the everyday realities of life that we can experience the holy and meet the Risen Christ. And both the painter and the poet have, in some way, I think, reminded us of Luke's message: that most of life is actually commonplace and ordinary, like pots and pans, and that wherever we are, whoever we are, at whatever time in history we are living, we are never isolated from the Presence of Christ.

We watch and wait and anticipate and hope for the divine to break into our lives with extraordinary clarity and lucidity, and sometimes that is what happens: words of a poem become more than words; the sound of the human voice or a piano becomes more than music, the splendor of a sunset becomes a call to stand in silence before the Creator.

But the Bible suggests that Jesus Christ comes to us in ways that are far more modest, in the daily round, in moments of kindness and compassion, in bread broken and meals shared, in a child announcing

the possibility of life, in the brightness of decades giving testimony to a life well-lived.

Sometimes you look at someone, and if the light is just right, or the moment translucent enough, and you look with the “eyes of your heart,” there is something of God there. Brother Lawrence, a monk in 17<sup>th</sup> century France said, “You need not cry very loud; he is nearer to us than we think.”

Saint Teresa of Avila shared a similar belief when she said, “Christ walks among the pots and pans.” To her, like Brother Lawrence, who took up the spiritual tasks of “the every day,” especially in the kitchen, every meal, every task, no matter how daily, no matter how modest, is an opportunity for recognizing the Lord. God doesn’t live in a remote corner of the universe but in the ordinary experiences of your life and heart. God lives not in a remote corner of a painting but in the kitchen when you are washing the pots and pans.

Christ walks among the pots and pans, among the dishtowels and the mixing bowls. Christ walks among the lawn mowers and paint and the paintbrushes. Christ walks among the dog at her bowl and the tea steeping in the pitcher. Christ walks among the computer and the file folders, the recycling and the vacuum cleaners, the diapers and the blankets, among the car keys and the errands, the cell phone and the laptops and the visits. Christ comes to you and walks with you . . . wherever you are, in the daily rounds of your life.

The words “practice resurrection” are familiar to us this time of year. Kyle Childress, pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches in east Texas, interprets them in a way that is instructive to those of us looking for the Risen Christ. He says:

*To practice resurrection*

*is somewhat similar to what we mean when we say that a physician has a medical practice or a lawyer has a legal practice; she practices medicine or he practices law.*

*In the case of church, we practice resurrection.*

*But to practice resurrection means we have to work at it over time under the supervision of competent teachers, coaches, and mentors*

*Like hitting a curve ball or playing the scales on the piano or reading a book, resurrection takes practice, practice, practice.*

*When we do the things Jesus did and we keep at it day after day, and we keep doing those things —  
prayer, worship, feeding the hungry,  
forgiving and receiving forgiveness, loving the least of these —and we do these things under the tutelage of the saints,  
teachers, writers, and pastors [and may I add painters and poets] from across time and around the globe,  
then we will become competent in seeing the Risen Lord.*

*We practice resurrection until we see the resurrected Christ.*

*It is in the practices that we will see him and know him.*

### **So look.**

The Risen Christ comes to those who are trying to follow, trying to love him, trying to be his people, trying to remember, trying not to miss seeing him. He comes to his friends, to those who know him, and in the breaking of bread. It is his gift to them. And we practice looking for Christ all the days, all the years of our lives.

Long ago, there was an appearance on Emmaus Road. And there are still moments when the doors to a Guest, the scriptures are explained, friendship offers an invitation, the wine is poured, and the bread is broken. And if the light is just right and you are practicing looking, you recognize the presence of the Resurrected Christ.



This is what happened to Cleopas and his companion at Emmaus on that first Easter evening. And it is what may happen to us, even “among the pots and pans, “on the road to believing.”

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