

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, April 19, 2026
"What Do You Long For?"

The Message

Today's Gospel passage is one of the most famous post-resurrection passages in the Bible.

At first glance, what we witness in this passage is two of Jesus's disciples walking along the road to Emmaus when a stranger approaches.

We as the readers know that this stranger is Jesus, but the two disciples do not recognize him.

It isn't until Jesus breaks bread in their home later that they finally see him for who he is.

I want to explore this passage a little deeper today.

For those of you who have been coming to church for a long time, you have probably heard sermons on this passage many times before.

Most sermons on this passage focus on either the idea of doubt or hospitality for the stranger. Certainly either of these themes are important and valid themes!

But today, I want to focus on grief and longing. These things don't have to go together necessarily, but in this passage, they do seem to fit together.

But first, let's use our imaginations to determine some of the details that have been left out of this story.

The scripture tells us that the two disciples were talking and thinking about what happened.

I wonder what their conversation might have looked like?

Maybe Cleopas says to the other disciple, "did you see all the people who were there, yelling for him to be crucified?"

"Yeah, it was awful. It was like they forgot about all the miracles he did for them and all the times he fed them when they were hungry."

Cleopas then says, “right, did they forget about all of that? It just doesn’t make sense. And now, this man who taught people the scriptures, shared his wisdom, performed miracles, and broke bread with people is gone.”

“Doesn’t scripture say he will rise from the dead, though, if he was truly the Messiah?”

Cleopas: “Yeah, but is that even really possible? I know the women found his tomb empty, but isn’t it more likely that someone robbed the tomb?”

“I suppose that’s more likely. I guess I’m not really sure. But either way, it was a loss of a great man who didn’t deserve to die like that.”

Cleopas: “Agreed. Do you remember when he healed the bleeding woman and the blind man? That was incredible! Those people received a tremendous gift from him.”

“Yeah, or the day when he’d been teaching us all day, and people were starting to get hungry and we tried to send the people home so he could eat? I can’t believe he asked us how much food we had, and we said a couple of fish and some measly loaves of bread. And then he told us to feed everyone with just that!”

Cleopas: “Oh my gosh, yes – over 5000 people got fed that day. I still can’t wrap my head around that! If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I couldn’t believe it. I barely believe it after having seen it!”

“No kidding! Jesus was truly a gift to us all. Honestly, I miss him. I wish he was still here, breaking bread with us. I wasn’t ready for him to go so soon. I mean, I know he told us that’s how it would have to happen. But, couldn’t he have saved himself?”

Cleopas: “I wondered that too. But I guess he couldn’t. It kind of makes you wonder, doesn’t it? Was he *really* the Messiah? I mean, I think so. Either way, I miss him, too. I wonder if he truly will return?”

“I hope so.”

Cleopas: “Me, too. Oh look, someone’s coming...”

At this point in the story, Cleopas and the other disciple meet Jesus, but they don’t recognize him.

There has been a lot written on why they don’t recognize him – much of it focused on their own doubt.

Pope Gregory I (the 64th Bishop of Rome from 590-604), also known as Saint Gregory the Great, said:

“They did not, in fact, have faith in him, yet they were talking about him. The Lord, therefore, appeared to them but did not show them a face they could recognize. In this way, the Lord enacted outwardly, before their physical eyes, what was going on in them inwardly, before the eyes of their hearts. For inwardly they simultaneously loved him and doubted him; therefore the Lord was outwardly present to them, and at the same time did not reveal his identity. Since they were speaking about him, he showed them his presence, but since they doubted him, he hid from them the appearance by which they could have recognized him.”

In other words, Pope Gregory believes their doubt clouded their vision.

But I also wonder if their grief and longing clouded their vision.

I have lost some very important people in my life. When those losses happened, of course I was grief-stricken. And the deep longing in my heart, at least initially, was that I wanted the person back.

We miss the people we lose. Often, we wonder if we told them we loved them enough, or if they knew how much they meant to us.

If only we could have one more day, we'd make *sure* they knew!

And there is often regret – regret that maybe we didn't handle things the way we would have if we'd known we were going to lose the person.

So I wonder if these disciples were in a similar place with their grief?

They witnessed what had to be an incredibly traumatic event, watching Jesus – someone they loved – being tortured to death on a cross.

Then, they watched him buried in the tomb, only to learn the next day that the tomb was empty.

And at this point, they didn't know Jesus has been resurrected. So their grief was compounded by this new development.

Not only that, but their grief was accompanied by a deep longing which they were hesitant to believe possible.

Jesus had told them he would return from death. But, that seemed impossible at the same time.

So they long for his return, but their longing is accompanied by grief and also some natural disbelief in something that seems impossible.

So when they encounter Jesus on the road, their longing overshadows their ability to truly know that Jesus was standing before them.

Yes, there is some disbelief in the impossible, but they also long so deeply for his return that they are unable to see that he is right in front of them.

I have been struggling with this recently, too, but for a different reason.

I have been longing so deeply for warmer weather that I have completely overlooked the beauty of the recent snowfalls.

No matter how much I want the snow to be gone, I cannot deny that spring snowfall can be beautiful, and that I can completely miss the beauty because of my longing for no more snow.

Similarly, when I go to hike in Banff, I could be longing so much to see a Moose that I miss all of the other amazing wildlife that is right in front of me.

I think this is what is happening for these disciples. Their longing for Jesus to return – for his promise to be true – is so strong that they cannot see anything else clearly.

They may even have a vision in their head of what his return would look like, so they cannot see him when he is right in front of them.

Jesus even attempts to explain the scriptures to them, and they still cannot see him for who he is. It isn't until he does something they recognize that they can finally see and know who he is.

When Jesus breaks bread with them, they can finally recognize him.

Their deep longing and thirst for the truth is finally quenched when Jesus does something that fits within their expectations of the Risen Christ.

So, they finally see Jesus for who he is.

And, so do we.

This story begs the question for us: what are *we* longing for that might be clouding *our* ability to see what is right in front of us?

Are there times when our longing for something is so strong that we become blind to everything else around us and we forget to live in the moment and notice the other amazing things about our life?

As you go about your day and your week ahead, may you ponder these questions.

May you wonder if there is something you long so deeply for that it is clouding your ability to see the many other wonderful gifts God has provided in your life.

And, if you do notice something that is creating a barrier for you, may you become aware of it and begin to work on unclouding your vision so you can see what *is* in front of you, ready and waiting to show you just how amazing your life is.

May you be fully aware of God's presence in your life, seeing God in all that is around you with fresh, clear eyes. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of mercy, forgive us when we allow our longing to cloud our vision so that we cannot fully see all of the gifts you have provided in our lives. Sometimes it is easier for us to focus on the things we so desperately want than it is for us to see the things we actually have. Open our eyes, O God, so that we can see your grace, your mercy, and your love in our lives. Amen.