

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Third Sunday of Easter
April 19, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Theme: Hope: Knowing Hope

[prayer]

Many of you know that I ring in a community handbell choir. We are busy preparing for our spring concerts and are down to our final three rehearsals. The last month of rehearsals is always where the rubber meets the road for me. It is the period when I must transition from *reading* the music to *feeling* the music. Feeling the music demands that I trust the muscle memory I have built over the previous months of rehearsal. Muscle memory allows me to focus less on my individual notes on the page and instead listen for my place in the choir, for my place in the melody or harmony of the song, trusting when it is my turn to ring not only because my mind tells me to but because my heart is caught up in the experience of making music.

When muscle memory takes over, our skill or knowledge stops being purely technical and becomes experiential. This idea of muscle memory helps illustrate our Gospel lesson today. Jesus appears to two of his followers, Cleopas and one other, possibly Cleopas's wife. Over the course of the story Jesus moves these disciples from a technical, intellectual knowledge of hope to an experiential knowledge found in relationship with the Living Christ.

Cleopas and his companion are returning to Emmaus after observing the Passover in Jerusalem. Their hearts are heavy with grief. They had hoped Jesus would fulfill the Scriptures by freeing Israel from the grip of Rome, but the Crucifixion has frustrated that hope. Their faith was crushed after watching hope die on a cross.

Perhaps it is this despair that keeps them from recognizing Jesus when he meets them on that road; they are too heartbroken and despondent to recognize hope. Or perhaps they are blinded by their expectations of what messianic victory

should look like. Here Jesus is, walking with them, talking to them, their hope restored in the flesh, and they do not recognize him! Jesus attempts to open their eyes by opening the scriptures for them – showing how his death and resurrection fulfilled the words of the prophets. But still these two disciples cannot see that he is their hope fulfilled.

This raises the question: If these disciples do not recognize Jesus by his teaching, how then *will* they recognize him?

John Wesley taught, and we continue to believe as Methodists, that the revelation of Christ is not contained in Scripture alone. It is also contained in our reason, our tradition, and importantly in our experience.

It was not until the *experience* of breaking bread together that these disciples’ “eyes were opened, and they recognized [Jesus]” (v. 31). They recognize Jesus after he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them with hands that bear the nail marks of his crucifixion. Those hands – the same hands that healed the sick, the same hands that flipped tables in the Temple just days earlier – offered them proof that the hope they thought died on a cross was once more alive and among them. There was in this intimate meal the memory of previous meals – the feeding of the five thousand, the Last Supper – where Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his friends. Those four verbs are Jesus’s signature. They are a cherished formula – the *anamnesis* – which we repeat ourselves every time we pray the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving.

Memory can prompt hope. And memory does not only reside in our minds; it resides in our bodies, too. This is why Jesus told his disciples to remember him through a physical action: Breaking bread together. Jesus calls us to a type of knowing that goes deeper than our intellects. We can and should study what Scripture says about hope, but we do not truly *know* hope until we have experienced it through a relationship with the Living Christ. Jesus is a *living* hope outside of the pages of our Bibles.

At the communion table we receive a unique form of divine revelation – revelation not in the form of words, but in the form of action. This action is called the *anagnorisis* – the moment when our eyes are opened and we recognize the body of the Risen Christ in the people gathered around the table, the hands

outheld for bread, the common cup we share. Aristotle wrote that “recognition [re-cognition] is, as its name indicates, a change from ignorance to knowledge,” and the best kind of recognition is “that which arises from the actions alone.”

The Church has always emphasized knowing Jesus through studying Scripture. The reading and interpretation of Scripture is an essential part of developing our ‘spiritual sight.’ It was during a reading of Martin Luther’s preface to the Letter to the Romans that John Wesley had his encounter with the Risen Christ. He wrote about that experience: “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.”¹ When Wesley heard the scriptures read, his heart burned, not unlike the disciples in our story.

But before the Church was the Church, with a canonized Scripture we now call the Holy Bible, it was a small community gathered around a meal with the belief that Jesus was somehow present in the bread and the cup. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.” Sharing food is central to our spiritual DNA as Christian disciples. Truthfully, it is central to our spiritual DNA as human beings. At the meal table, we recognize our common humanity. At the meal table we build relationships around our shared need to be fed. At the meal table, our souls are refreshed in hospitality and fellowship. Every meal has the potential of being a sacred occasion.

By the time Jesus, Cleopas, and his companion reach Emmaus, it is evening and darkness is falling. Even though they still do not know that this stranger is Jesus, they urge Jesus to stay with them. They choose to offer him hospitality. And that hospitality becomes a conduit for God’s grace. The stranger – Jesus – becomes the host, and these two disciples have their hope restored.

How do we know the hope that is the Risen Christ? How do we comprehend his resurrected body?

The Letter to the Hebrews says, “Don’t stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near” (10:25).

¹ Journal (ed. N. Curnock) 24 May 1738

Scripture gives us the framework for our spiritual sight, but it is our experience of Jesus in the gathered body through hospitality and fellowship where we really put flesh on the bones of hope. In our Gospel story the disciples literally move from the isolation of grief to the hope of community with Jesus at the center (“where two or three are gathered I am there among them”). Communal practice is necessary for cultivating hope. We cannot grow hope on our own. We do it together, with each other, in community. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the Church became his resurrected body on earth. And so, it is our communion with each other, our Christ-centered relationships with each other, that reveal the resurrected body of Christ, that help us comprehend what hope in the Risen Jesus looks like.

Friends, here is our second spiritual discipline that cultivates hope: The spiritual discipline of community. Do not neglect to meet together. Enjoy a meal...with each other. Pray...with each other. Read Scripture...with each other. After Jesus vanishes from the disciples’ sight, they spend time in conversation with each other, discussing what Jesus said and what they experienced. We need other people to help us discern and interpret what God is saying and doing in our lives. There is no such thing as a solo Christian. Communion with God ultimately requires communion with each other.

Amen.