Luke 24:13-35
Psalm 23

Rev. Julie Yarborough
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Walking with Grief

A couple of weeks ago, Salia Kamara preached about one of the post-resurrection stories known as the story of Doubting Thomas. He reminded us that Jesus meets us where we are, even when we're locked in our fears and sadness.

Today we hear a second post-resurrection story, of which there are three, the third being the "breakfast on the beach" story in the Gospel of John, where the disciples are out in their boats, not far from shore, and he appears to them after they have been fishing all night and haven't caught anything. In each of these stories Jesus meets the disciples in their fear and in their grief, and we find ourselves located in these stories as well. These stories assure us that Jesus meets *us* in *our* fear, Jesus meets *us* in *our* grief, even when we don't recognize him.

We are all grieving. We grieve the death of loved ones, catastrophic events, life-altering illnesses, the loss of jobs, the dissolution of marriages, and more. We grieve the harm being done to our planet at rapidly accelerating speed. We grieve the

abuses of power by governmental leaders, the erosion of the rule of law, the cruel indifference to the suffering of millions of people around the world, the careless and violent acts of war that kill innocent civilians. We grieve for what once was and for what never will be. We grieve because we love.

Rev. Cameron Trimble writes:

"This grief is not a sign that something is wrong with us. It is a sign that we are paying attention.

Grief is not a problem to be solved. It is a relational process to be metabolized, to be integrated into the body of our awareness and action without letting it paralyze us or take us hostage. When grief is unacknowledged, it hardens into cynicism, spills into rage or deadens into despair. When it is honored and worked with, it becomes a source of clarity and connection. There is a way of moving with grief that does not demand resolution, but does invite transformation."[1]

We all respond to grief differently - with disbelief, fear, deep sadness, anger, and sometimes by shutting down. If we can do the work of acknowledging and honoring our grief, letting ourselves feel all the feelings, we can move through it more smoothly, allowing ourselves to be transformed through our

[1] Rev. Cameron Trimble, https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/thoughts-on-grief

suffering. It is a painful process, yes, but denying our sadness doesn't help us to move forward, it only holds us back. It is helpful to remember that we are not alone in our sadness. We walk alongside others who are also grieving and we are all surrounded by the absolute presence and love of God, who in the words of James Finley, "…protects us from nothing, but sustains us in everything."

Sharing our losses with one another, is a helpful and healthy way to process. In her poem, "What if, instead of grief," Rosemary Wahtola Trommer writes:

What if, instead of grief,
We call it a pollination,
A process through which we realize
The gold of our hearts must spill out
And if we are to survive as a species,
It requires we somehow exchange this gold with each other - all our hearts
Splayed open, all our hearts needing
What the other hearts have.
It's messy. Vulnerable.
And this is how we go on.
Your grief. My grief.

The quiet buzz of conversation.
This splitting open. This spilling.
This sharing with each other.[2]

Rosemary Wahtola Trommer knows grief well. A few years ago, her young adult son, Finn, died by suicide. Having been a poet and a writer for many years, Trommer naturally turned to writing to help her process the pain. Today, she helps others do the same by offering poetry writing workshops focused on grief. I had the privilege of attending one with her in November 2025 at the Kripalu Center in the Berkshires following my mother's death. I'm not really a writer, but spending time on retreat, doing the writing exercises and sharing with a group of people who were also in the throes of grief was extremely helpful.

When asked how she thinks differently about grief after experiencing the death of her son, Trommer replied:

"What I think I know now, that I didn't know then, before, was just how many ways there are to show up for grief, and how everyone of us will do it in our own way and that everyone of us will do it so differently even from moment to moment - and how

[2] Poem by Rosemary Wahtola Trommer, from *A Hundred Falling Veils* (September 3, 2024)

right that is for there to be so many flavors of grief, so many ways to meet it."[3]

After Jesus' death, many of the disciples were gathered together in a locked room, while others were out fishing, or walking, or doing other things, trying to make sense of his death in their own ways.

In today's story, known as the Walk to Emmaus, Jesus appears to two disciples on their way to Emmaus, a town about 7 miles away from Jerusalem, but they don't recognize him. Perhaps their grief blinds them - or perhaps something else more supernatural is taking place - the text suggests that they are "held back" from recognizing him.

Although they don't realize they are talking to Jesus, he meets these travelers where they are in their grief. He asks them what they're discussing and lets them talk about their great loss - both for the spiritual leader they once knew and loved and for their hopes and dreams that would not be fulfilled. He doesn't say, "Hey it's me! I'm alive! Don't be sad." He doesn't try to take away their grief, he simply travels beside them as a companion.

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[3] Video, https://www.wordwoman.com/about/

Cleopas and his fellow traveler had been looking for a savior who would deliver Israel from the oppressive government of Rome. They told this stranger who was walking beside them that they had hoped Jesus would rescue them, that he would be the one to redeem - or liberate - Israel. They described Jesus as a prophet mighty in word and deed, but they didn't understand the full scope of who Jesus was until he explained the scriptures to them and how the words of the prophets were fulfilled by his life, death and resurrection.

It's only *after* they have a chance to explain what they're discussing, to reminisce and describe why they're so upset, that Jesus patiently explains what they don't understand. In the version of the scriptures I read earlier, Jesus says, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" Here's another way of translating this sentence that makes Jesus sound a little more sympathetic: "Oh, you don't understand; how slow you are to fully comprehend what the scriptures say." And then he takes the time to explain it to them.

As he spoke to them and explained the scriptures, their hearts burned - they became more alive, they felt something warm inside, their bodies reacted to the truth of what he was

saying, even before their minds were able to process the knowledge. Luke tells us that it wasn't until the moment that Jesus broke bread with them that they actually recognized him - and then he vanished.

The Greek word for recognized used in this passage (epi-ghi-NO-sko) means that they not only realized it was Jesus in their midst - they recognize him for who he was - they knew him accurately. Their eyes were opened and they could see him clearly, they finally understood: Jesus didn't just come to save Israel, his life and death and resurrection would transform the world.

Father Richard Rohr writes,

"Every resurrection story seems to strongly affirm an ambiguous—yet certain—presence in very ordinary settings, like walking on the road to Emmaus with a stranger, roasting fish on the beach, or one who appeared like a gardener to the Magdalene. [1] These moments from Scripture set a stage of expectation and desire that God's presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material, and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions."[4]

[4] Father Richard Rohr, https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-sacramental-principle-2022-04-24/

The risen Christ walks beside us, too, and we don't often recognize him. In our grief and pain, in our wonder and joy, when we walk alongside each other and when we break bread together, that ambiguous, yet certain presence is with us as well.

May our eyes be opened so that we, too, can see clearly, and be transformed by, the Holy presence that walks beside us on our journeys.

Amen.