

# A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt Burleson

**“It’s Still my Favorite Story”**

**Luke 24: 13-35**

**September 23, 2007**

The older I get... the more fascinated I am by the gift God has given us in Scripture.

A word that keeps becoming the Word to me...

A story with endless layers...

Every text prompting a thousand sermons.

Over the past few years, it’s rare a week went by that I didn’t say, **“Well... gosh... I’ve never seen that before... never heard it that way...”** It’s as if it’s leading us someplace... Living Wisdom working with us in some personal way.

Like a lot of you, I grew up hearing and knowing the Bible’s narratives... but the first time I remember hearing “The Road to Emmaus” I was a freshman at Baylor. I went to hear Grady Nutt and Grady introduced me to a story that has become my story.

It’s a story only Luke tells... About these two, fairly random folks, walking home to Emmaus a suburb of Jerusalem. This story is really different from the other stories. The others are all pretty dramatic.

There Jesus is suddenly... in the Garden.

Or poof, there his is in the middle of a room...

Saying very profound and dramatic things...

Blessing and commissioning them.

This story is different.

It’s these two people, one of them named Cleopas and the other named... Betty???? Well... it doesn’t say what the other one’s name was and so I like to call her Betty. Or it might be Cleopas and Barney. Betty’s better, I think. The point being... these seem like average folks dealing with something not average at all. ... Ordinary folks in the midst of something extra-ordinary.

Jesus had been crucified...

There are rumors of some ladies seeing him alive.

The real players are gathered in Jerusalem...

Wondering mostly wondering.

Cleopas and Betty headed home to the suburbs... The weekend’s over and they’ve got to get the kids to school. Cleopas has a big order of dried figs to get out the next day.

All the other appearances are to Apostles and Saints. Saint Mary Magdalene... Saint Peter... Saint John. In this story Jesus appears to Cleopas and Betty... just walking home... nothing real dramatic.

Luke says, that they were, **“talking with each other about everything that had happened.”** You know how you do after a shocking event... a 9-11 kind of moment... everyone just keeps processing.

Something in us needs to retell and ... that’s what they were doing. **“I just didn’t think they’d really kill him.” “I know... that was the fear but I thought things would work out.” “Did you see how quiet he was at the trial?” “Didn’t say a thing, did he?” “Why did it have to be a cross... how humiliating... with thieves on either side to boot.”**

And they’re talking and Jesus himself comes up and walks alongside them and they were kept from recognizing him. Luke’s careful with the way he says it. Not, **“they didn’t recognize him.”** Nope... **“they were kept from it.”**

And as a 19 year old struggling to believe... that was the line that got me. I’d come out of the womb with a million questions and by the time I was sixteen I’d added a gillion more... And the first on the list was **“is any of this true?”** And the second was, **“why is this so hard? What am I not doing right.”**

And as Luke told their story... It became mine. **“They were kept from recognizing him.”**

Whatever the reason... it wasn’t their fault. They weren’t to blame for not knowing. And somehow I heard this Living Word saying to me... **“It’s not your fault.”** Others... lots of others, were having an easy time... but not me... not Cleopas and Betty.

They were kept from recognizing him. It happens... anyone read Time magazine’s story on Mother Teresa’s long and lonely dark night? We don’t know why but we wonder if it’s that this hiddenness has the potential for taking us further into this journey with God.

Our task is the journey. Journey’s are big deals to Luke and I think Luke saying that the story of Betty and Cleopas going home is like any of ours trying to get home... We’re on a journey and Jesus is going to walk with us, even though we won’t always know it.

Jesus, just sort of intersects with them and says, **“Hey... whatcha’ talkin’ ‘bout?”**

**“You gotta be kidding me,”** Betty said. And Cleopas added, **“You must be the only one in these parts not up to speed on what happened to Jesus.”**

**“Oh???”**, Jesus said, baiting them on.

And they told him about all the hopes they’d had for Jesus and what the rulers had done to him... and that’s when they did the Bible study. Jesus, the teacher of teachers, told them everything the prophets had said about him and how this was to be expected. Still they didn’t recognize him.

They are listening to the Word Incarnate teach the bible and still, nothing...

And this goes on a while... It was seven miles to Emmaus. Probably up and down some hills... a stop at the Cracker Barrel to get something for the kids. This took most of the day and by the time they get home it’s almost dark.

This is the ancient Middle East, where hospitality is a sacred duty. And it wasn't just that there weren't any Best Westerns... it was that they knew that how a society takes care of the stranger in it's midst matters to God. So... Cleopas and Betty are supposed to invite them in.

But Luke makes a point of saying, **“Jesus acted like he was to go further.”** In other words, he faked it... like he was going to the next house or the next village. He just keeps walking... **“Okay... good traveling with you Cleopas... nice to meet you Betty. Jesus acted like he was to go further.”**

It is one of the most important lines in all of scripture. This is God's MO... because it's Love's MO. It is at the very heart of our faith. We get to choose.

God is with us...

Around us...

Revealing... enticing...

But never coercing us into faith. God cannot do or be other than this. God is love and love always leaves room for the other... even if the other says, NO.

Betty saw Jesus doing his nice-walking-with-you routine, and said, **“No... we wouldn't think of it... you're staying with us.”** So Jesus goes into their home, still unrecognized.

So, after they greet the kids and get them all to bed and send off the baby-sitter... they get a simple meal ready... Probably pull out a few leftovers. Had a little barbecue goat left and some lentil beans... and bread.

Luke makes it very clear that it was at the table where they recognize Jesus.

**“When he was at the table, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.”** That's when their eyes were opened and do notice the language... not **“they opened their eyes,”** NO **“their eyes were opened.”**

It's a paradox, I know. We have to try and open our eyes... We have to work at seeing... at being awake and all that. But isn't it a great relief to know that at the end of the day, even that is grace. God opens our eyes.

Cleopas and Betty knew Jesus but there was a moment one night at their table as Jesus offered them bread that they saw... they moved to another level of knowing. When... **He took the break, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them.**

Everyone reading this in the early church would have gotten all excited and started flipping back through the papyrus. **“This sounds familiar, doesn't it.”**

And sure enough, it was. At another meal... a big meal, that 5000 plate banquet, Luke used the same language. **“He took the fishes and loaves and... gave thanks and broke them and gave them to them.”**

Same language... same order.

He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave.

And the early church Christians flipped over a few more pages and there it was again. In that Upper Room the night before Jesus dies... It's tender and strange and mysterious... but it's the same. **“he took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them.”**

I'd preached this text for years before I saw that... preached it for years before I knew it was possible for me.

It was at the table... where they gathered... after going through so very much... As they were taking a break from the journey... that's when their eyes were open. When they came hungry and together to the table... to receive what had been blessed and what had been broken and what had been so freely offered to them.

Amen.

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