

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



In this Easter season we are considering stories of the risen Jesus at the end of the gospels, and how they call us to live in light of the resurrection. Last week, Lucy Baum reminded us of the story of Thomas the Doubter, whose questions were met by the compassion of Christ. Now we turn our attention to the experience of two disciples on Easter evening on their walk to a town called Emmaus.

Listen with me now for the Word of the Lord as it comes to us from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, verses 13-35:

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.***

*Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” **They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.***

*As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” **So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”** That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”*

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

Here ends our reading. This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

[SIT DOWN]

There is a certain consistent pattern in the way Jesus shows up, which can be traced throughout the gospels and is evident even in this post-resurrection story. **He is Rabbi, teacher, as he is here, explaining the scriptures to these two disciples. He is the Good shepherd, a pastor, as he is here, coming alongside those who are walking the road of confusion and disillusionment.** And he gives of himself to meet the needs of his people, as he does here, at table as he breaks bread, and shares nourishment with the hungry. This is his consistent pattern.

And, yet, the text before us this morning challenges at least this reader, because of a few details that seem to run counter to all of those images of Jesus, or at least our expectations about how he is *supposed* to show up.

It's a story in two parts. First, two grieving disciples encounter Jesus on the road they are walking, and he is a stranger to them. And okay, we can grant that maybe, just maybe, these disciples of his had never seen him up close - Cleopas and the other disciple, likely his wife, weren't a part of the original twelve. **And he is explaining scripture to them, which we recognize as the sort of thing Jesus would do, since the gospels are filled with stories of Jesus on the road encountering the people of God, helping them understand God's story. But what we don't expect is the detail included in verse 28 - that after walking with them for a time, he walked ahead as if he were going on, departing from them. That seems like a mistake, right?**

And then there's this one. When he starts walking away, they beg him to stay with them, and so he does. He stays, and eats a meal at table with them, as he often did with his disciples. And it is there, as he takes bread and blesses and gives it to them that they finally realize who he is - recognize him as Jesus the Christ - and then verse 31 reports that he vanishes from their sight.

And that has always been a real head-scratcher for me. Why, after all of that, would Jesus disappear? Why does their revelation almost immediately issue in an *inability* to see him, the One whom they'd finally recognized in their midst? One of the promises of our faith that I cling most closely to is that we are never alone, that God is with us in all things, and so I struggle with the idea that the Risen Lord was intimately involved with them in one minute, and then walking ahead of them independently in another. **Sharing a meal with them, and then, suddenly, not seen.**

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

Except. Except that that's how my own experience of faith has often worked. And here is what I mean.

One of my favorite theological conversation partners in this church and I have a friendly debate about the nature of faith and of hope. And she is right. Hope, she would point out, is fleeting. It comes and goes. **That's why the poet Emily Dickinson famously likened hope to a bird, saying "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul. And sings the tune without the words and never stops at all." Of course, the implication, though, is that if hope is a bird, it can easily fly away. And that's the trouble with hope.** Faith, my friend argues, is something else. It is sturdier. It can be counted on. And that is why she prefers it. That is why it brings her comfort. And that is why she inspires me.

But my experience is a little different from hers, if I'm honest.

Because my experience of faith is that, it too, like a bird, sometimes comes, and sometimes goes.

Sometimes I feel it and am grounded by it, and sometimes it is harder for me to find.

Sometimes it is easy for me to see Jesus in the face of my neighbor, and sometimes, frankly, it is not.

Sometimes, I can think about scripture and my heart burns within me in recognition of God's goodness - of something primordially familiar and true - and sometimes I question Christ's accompaniment of me, or at least cannot recognize it.

Sometimes God's call feels sure, and sometimes I am not so sure.

And sometimes...sometimes the way God is at work in the world and in the church is clear - and other times, I catch myself wondering if the Divine is paying any kind of attention.

And I don't think I am alone in this experience.

And that is why, once I can get past my kneejerk first reaction to it, I am comforted by this post-resurrection story about Jesus, and am even thankful for those weird little details about him seeming to walk ahead and away from his companions on the road, and disappearing as soon as he is recognized by them. **Because in their experience, I see my own, and I recognize the Jesus whom I cannot predict or control, but who calls me nonetheless. This is a story for those of us who occasionally feel our hearts burning within us, but oftentimes do not, and who choose to put one foot in front of the other anyway.** We don't hear anything about these two disciples after this story, and yet I can imagine they walked on, carrying within them an imprinted memory of the time they encountered the living Lord. And I imagine that they had to keep reminding each other of what they'd experienced, in order to keep the faith kindled in ordinary time.

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

And that is what the church is. We are disciples who remind each other over and over again, in our shared acts, of the Jesus in whom we trust, especially when he is hard to see and harder still to pin down. We give our witness, our memory, as kindling to the fire of each other’s hearts. And so, together, we offer each other the gift of faith over and over again.

One of my favorite church memories happened because of a mistake. Someone - and I am not sure who was responsible - forgot to restock the elements for communion on a Sunday we were scheduled to partake of the sacrament, and they didn’t realize it until just before the early service.

My colleague and I knew nothing about it until we entered the robing room and were met by the leader of the Communion Guild, and she was absolutely frantic, though papering over it with a certain can-do kind of southern assertiveness. She told us not to worry - to just start the service and that they’d figure something out and come in calmly to set the elements on the table like it was planned this way all along.

And that is what we did. And I have this very distinct memory of watching my colleague stand up behind the table to give announcements the same way we do here at the beginning of the service, and keep his composure as this woman and her communion crew came parading in - almost too solemnly, almost over-selling it - to set the elements on the table. They’d found the juice somewhere, so that was good, but in place of bread, they’d brought in spicy sesame seed crackers. Strangely, the only thing on hand.

And so, when it came time to partake of the sacrament, my colleague lifted this truly tiny sesame seed cracker in the air, and to his credit *without laughing* said, “This is the joyful feast of the people of God.”

And that was just the early service. Believe it or not, we were worse off at the 11 o’clock. Thinking quickly about how to avoid that same comical moment, this same volunteer realized that there was always a real loaf of bread on the communion table, regardless of whether or not we were having communion in worship. **And so, in order that I would have something a little more visible to lift, said to me on the way in, “The table loaf has been scored on the bottom so you have bread to break.”**

And I should have known better. But I didn’t. And so, when the time came out, I lifted the hardened loaf of real bread that had been sitting there for an indeterminate amount of time, and I reminded the people that Jesus had blessed and broke it and then I began to pull - and when I say that that loaf shattered, I mean it. **It shattered into dust and tiny little pieces, and several big chunks fell down the sleeve of my robe**

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



so that I sort of had to shimmy to get them back out onto the plate, and several more chunks flew into the first two pews, where our youth group happened to be seated that day so that they could be commissioned for a mission trip later in the service. But were pelted by stale elements instead.

The Communion Guild couldn't talk about it for months. But when we finally did, we dubbed it the Crouton Jesus Incident. And that is when we began storing back-up bread in the freezer, just in case.

Of course, I remember the story because it was every Type A Presbyterian's nightmare. But I also remember the story because we told the story to each other over and over again. We revisited it. For awhile at that church, you could be in almost any committee meeting, or around any table at a congregational lunch, and if someone said, "Do you remember the time..." everyone could finish the sentence. Yes. Yes, we remember.

We remember our shared experience that day, and how surprised we were that Jesus showed up among us - and even in spite of us - and fed us anyway. Not just in body, but in spirit and truth and even a little bit of laughter.

We remember how clearly we could see the community of faith as it really is, at work together, sharing a life together, muddling through it together - and how he knit our imperfection together into a vessel that could receive his surprising grace.

We remember looking into each other's eyes for cues about what to do next when we would normally kept them piously downcast.

And we remember the anxiety that gave way to permission to smile as grace was conferred and our self-seriousness was contextualized by it.

And we remember the evanescent joy - joy that bubbled up just for a moment, and then left an imprinted memory of the grace that always comes to us when - and how - we need it most.

And everyone could tell the story of how our hearts burned in recognition of Jesus there in the midst of it with us - even the youth who had been in the crouton landing zone.

Sometimes, I worry that people who only hear the story we tell on Easter morning are led to believe that faith is always this experience of unbridled joy or unshakeable certainty that never goes away. **And sometimes it is those things. But most times, faith is the shared act of remembering God's goodness, God's present provision - for each other, in times when we need it most.**

It is resolving to help each other go about our days with a certain openness to welcoming Jesus as he comes alongside us, and to trust him even when he is hard to see or we don't know what to do. Faith is helping each other to accept that we cannot orchestrate how and when we will experience him, and even

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

more, it is embracing the fact that Jesus often shows up most clearly in our most human moments. **Like when we're reading scripture, but can't make sense of it. Or when we're walking the road of disillusionment or confusion. Or when we're sharing a meal with friends and strangers and have a moment when our hearts burn with the recognition that this everyday act is a gift that he blesses. When we've shown up imperfectly, made a mistake, or forgotten what is ours to do, and been surprised that Paul had it right - that God's strength is perfected in our weakness.**

Faith is not always fanfare, I mean. It does not require having a heart constantly ablaze. It is also the shared discipline of reminding each other that grace always comes to us - we who are slow of heart, we who try to get it right but often do not, we who can be myopic and mopey and entitled, not only when we need it most, but how we need it most, into the mundane moments of our lives as they actually are.

And that sometimes, all we've got to go on is an imprinted memory of a time when Jesus showed up in those moments. And this is not a mistake. It is Easter faith in ordinary time.

I heard a story this week that helped me make sense of those odd little details about Jesus's behavior in this text - his walking ahead of the disciples, his vanishing from their sight. **Yesterday afternoon, I officiated a funeral. And in preparation for that funeral, I asked the man's son to tell me some stories about what his dad had taught him. And he teared up and said, "You know, my dad was pretty straightforward. And he loved us with a steady, tough love. And when I was in college and on the verge of failing out, he took me aside, and said, "Son, if you fail out, you're on your own. And for whatever reason, I was able to hear that as a vote of confidence in me, that he believed in me, that counter-intuitively he was with me all the way. And, it gave me what I needed to keep on going. And every time I remember that conversation, all I can feel is gratitude. It was a gift."**

Maybe that's what is happening in our text today, too. On the surface, Jesus seems capricious, his behavior odd. But I wonder if what he is doing is not vacating, but calling these two to be radically present to one another. I wonder if he is entrusting these two disciples with the work that is theirs to do in a world where he won't always be visible. I wonder if he is giving them to each other in a whole new way, commissioning them to the work of witness and memory, communicating to them that he thinks they can do it. So that, come what may, they could call each other back to faith by saying, one saying "Do you remember the time..." and the other finishing the sentence. "Do you remember the time our hearts burned within us?" Yes. Yes, I remember.

“Reborn to the Ordinary”

Scripture: **Luke 24:13-35**

Rev. Anna Dickson

April 19, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

One of my favorite definitions of faith comes from Rabbi Danya Ruttenburg, who says that faith “is the work of forgiving the world for being imperfect and consenting to live in it anyway, with an open heart.”

And I might add that we’ve got to help each other do that. We’ve been entrusted to one another by Jesus himself to keep the faith for each other. We’ve got to help each other remember that Jesus shows up in the midst of imperfection, confusion, and grief, when we don’t know what comes next...even if just for a time, and gives us just enough nourishment, just enough of himself to keep on going.

And so here is the call today, church: let’s be the kind of church that enjoys the surprise of Christ’s presence with us when we experience it. And we do experience it. Do you remember? Our hearts have burned as we’ve met our neighbors at our pantry door. Counter-intuitively, it has also happened as we have banded together over these last several months and reminded each other of God’s long faithfulness in this place, even in times of change and challenge. **It has happened around this font. It has happened during the swells of countless choral anthems. It’s about to happen as the children of this community come flooding back into this sanctuary full of a sense of their belonging here, thanks be to God.**

The world is heavy, and hope can be fleeting, I know. But we have been given to each other. And so, let us be more resolved than ever to be the kind of church that helps imprint the memory of Jesus’ presence on each other’s hearts, a church that blows on the embers of faith until it is rekindled, even and especially in times when it is harder to come by. And make no mistake of it: this is Easter faith in ordinary time.

To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.