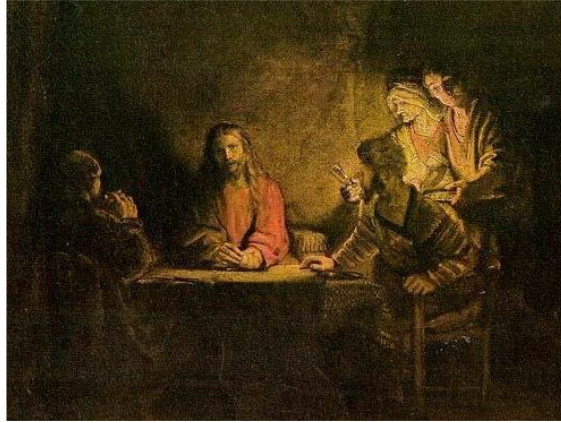


Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
Third Sunday of Easter
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

Already knowing that Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John had found the tomb of Jesus empty, two (or more?) close disciples left Jerusalem in despair... all their hopes dashed.

As I study [Rembrandt's](#) 17th c. rendition of "The Road to Emmaus," what lesson can I take away from this scene for those times when I'm feeling "down" and just can't see a positive way forward?

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Artist of Souls

Risen Christ, artist of souls...
help me as I take up your invitation
to prayer and simplicity.
Sharpen my hunger for your friendship...
and whet my thirst for your living water.
I pray this in your name.
Amen.

Source: Lis Burke's post at [Episcopalian's on Facebook](#)

Scripture Readings

Acts of the Apostles 2: 14, 22-33 "Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency."

Psalm 16: 1-2, 5-8 “My choice is you, God, first and only.”

I Peter 1: 17-21 “Now that you’ve cleaned up your lives by following the truth, love one another as if your lives depended on it.”

Luke 24: 13-35 “That same [resurrection] day, two of Jesus’ disciples were walking to the village Emmaus.”

Introduction to the Third Sunday of Easter

As we reflect on the Gospels of the Sundays after Easter, we recognize a developing theme. From Easter morning to the day of Jesus’ ascension into heaven, he made a targeted “farewell tour.” He sought out his frightened and spiritually paralyzed friends in their hiding places and locked rooms. During these visits, he assured them—individually and collectively—that he had forgiven them for abandoning him on that terrifying night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We focus this week on St. John’s account of disillusioned disciples, one of them named Cleopas, walking away from all that occurred in Jerusalem. Having surrendered all hope, they made their way to safety. They soon learned—and *we* with them—that disciples of the Risen Christ can *run* from him... but they cannot *hide*. He chased after these shocked and discouraged disciples as they sought the safer climes of small-town Emmaus.

Doesn’t it seem strange that these two lost hope *after* they heard about the empty tomb—“They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive”? Rising from the dead? Who could do that? This made no sense. No one had ever come back from death, not even Israel’s greatest prophets. Jesus patiently listened to their story. When they finished, he whispered, “So thick-headed! ... So slow-hearted!” Then, “Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said?”

Cleopas and his companion must have been at the Last Supper, because they suddenly recognized the Risen Lord in the ritual of “breaking bread” and giving it to them as Eucharist. Jesus didn’t order them to return to Jerusalem with the news. Receiving the Eucharist itself fueled their decision to rush back.

Don’t we hear in this Easter appearance an echo of the instructions Jesus gave to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: 1ff—*Come... See... Go... Tell?*

A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (2: 14, 22-33)

“Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency... ‘Fellow Israelites, listen carefully to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man thoroughly accredited by God to you—the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through him are common knowledge—this Jesus, following the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God, was betrayed by men who took the law into their own hands, and was handed over to you. And you pinned him to a cross and killed him. But God untied the death ropes and raised him up. Death was no match for him.

“David said it all: ‘I saw God before me for all time. Nothing can shake me; he’s right by my side. I’m glad from the inside out, ecstatic; I’ve pitched my tent in the land of hope. I know you’ll never dump me in Hades; I’ll never even smell the stench of death. You’ve got my feet on the life-path, with your face shining sun-joy all around.’

“Dear friends, let me be completely frank with you. Our ancestor David is dead and buried—his tomb is in plain sight today. But being also a prophet and knowing that God had solemnly sworn that a descendant of his would rule his kingdom, seeing far ahead, he talked of the resurrection of the Messiah—‘no trip to Hades, no stench of death.’ This Jesus, God raised up. And every one of us here is a witness to it.”

Personal Reflection

St. Luke, author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, described those first idyllic weeks and months of the Jesus People communities. We might call that time the “honeymoon period” of Christian history. As we know from our own experience, every couple’s honeymoon gives way to the everyday realities of life—work, school, family.... The list goes on and on.

For the small band of Jesus’ followers, reality included running debates with the Temple leadership, as we see in this first reading.

— *When in my life did I experience that same feeling of the “honeymoon” being over? What was it like? How well did I handle my experience of it?*

Responsorial: Psalm 16 (1-2, 5-11)

A psalm of David

Lord, you will show us the path of life.

Keep me safe, O God,
I’ve run to you for dear life.
I say to God, “Be my Lord!”
Without you, nothing makes sense.
Lord, you will show us the path of life.

My choice is you, God, first and only.
And now I find I’m *your* choice!
You set me up with a house and yard.
And then you made me your heir!
Lord, you will show us the path of life.

The wise counsel God gives when I'm awake
is confirmed by my sleeping heart.
Day and night I'll stick with God;
I've got a good thing going, and I'm not letting go.
Lord, you will show us the path of life

Personal Reflection

In our daily lives, most of us invest so much time and energy on the “little gods” we carve for ourselves and too little time in service to the One True God. The empty offerings we make offer little or no return, only a frenzy to get more of whatever “rabbits” we are chasing. They cannot lead us to the high mysticism of David (in his early years, at least). If we decide to focus on the lasting good of a thoughtful, prayerful life, we will experience deeper satisfaction and peace of mind in our daily lives. So, let's not sacrifice our Christian identity on the altar of all that is not-God.

— *What are the “little gods” that take up some—or too much—of my waking hours? (This is a hard question, so take some time to reflect and identify at least one of them.)*

A Reading from the First Letter of St. Peter (1: 17-21)

“You call out to God for help and he helps—he's a good Father that way. But don't forget, he's also a responsible Father, and won't let you get by with sloppy living.

“Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb. And this was no afterthought. Even though it has only lately—at the end of the ages—become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you. It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God.

“Now that you've cleaned up your lives by following the truth, love one another as if your lives depended on it. Your new life is not like your old life. Your *old* birth came from mortal sperm; your *new* birth comes from God's living Word. Just think—a life *conceived by God himself!*”

Personal Reflection

Writing from Rome in 66 AD/CE, Peter tells his far-off readers in modern-day Turkey that God will judge their lives and daily works. He also tells them about the precious cost of their redemption by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which has freed them from lives of futility.

Australian theologian, [Marg Mowczko](#), MA, says of this passage in [1 Peter](#): “One of the wonderful truths of Christianity is that all people are equal in God's eyes. Unlike most of us, God does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity... or gender... or earthly wealth and status. As redeemed people, made righteous and reconciled by Jesus' sacrifice, we are all equally loved and valued by him. God does not show

favoritism. Rather, all Christian men and women are his favorites in that God has freely bestowed his favor and grace on us, even though we don't deserve it. God is impartial in bestowing grace... and impartial in exercising judgement."

"Your new life is not like your old life."

— *How is my life as a Christian today different from a time when I didn't pay much attention to what Jesus asked of me? What could I do more... and even better than my service and commitment today? Will I do it?*

A Reading from the Gospel According to Luke (24: 13-35)

"That same [resurrection] day, two of Jesus' disciples were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

"He asked, 'What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?'

"They just stood there, long faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, 'Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?'

"He said, 'What has happened?'

"They said, 'The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was *alive*. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus.'

"Then he said to them, 'So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?'

"Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

"They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: 'Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done.' So, he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

"Back and forth they talked. 'Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?'

“They didn’t waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: ‘It’s really happened! The Master has been raised up—Simon *saw* him!’”

“Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.”

Personal Reflection

“We had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel.” What a poignant, deeply human admission. One sentence packed with so much pain and disillusionment.

In his reply, Jesus seemed to be scolding and insensitive to his disciples’ pain: “Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said?” Jesus stated the truth... but in a spirit of personal love and deep caring for these folks who seemed to have lost everything they had invested in.

— *Can I recall an “I had my hopes up” moment in my own life—a time when a dream or expectation did not turn out the way I had expected. How did I feel at that moment? What helped me to recover... to regain a sense of equanimity (calm, peace) in my life?*

— *What remnants of that past disappointment still creep up on me—suddenly, “out of the blue”? How do I deal with painful memories and their accompanying feelings?*

For Inspirational Listening, Watching and Reading

Listen

“I Can See” (The Emmaus Road) by [Steve Green](#)

Watch

[3rd Sunday of Easter](#) (Cycle A—same as C) gospel reflection by [John Michael Talbot](#) (2 min)

Read

[The Risen Christ](#) by [Caryll Houselander](#) (2021 reprint of the 1958 edition)

If you have not already read this wonderful Easter Season book I’ve recommended before, give it a go. You won’t be sorry. *Note: Houselander died in 1954. Sheed & Ward published this book after her death.*

Preview of Next Weekend’s Scriptures

4th Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 2: 14, 36-41 “Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: ‘Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem....’”

Psalms 23: 1-6 “Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I’m not afraid when you walk at my side.”

1 Peter 2: 20-25 “This is the kind of life you’ve been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived.”

John 10: 1-10 “When (the shepherd) gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice.”

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

Road to Emmaus Prayer

I don’t always recognize you, Lord.

Open my eyes. I pray.

Without the gift of your revelation...

my eyes cannot recognize you.

Appear before me... suddenly... unexpectedly...

in all your glory... so that I, too, may proclaim...

to a world in despair... that I have seen you, the Risen Lord.

Amen

Source: [Nathan Bierma](#)

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from
The Message Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
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