

A Tale of Two Meals

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a seven-part series

March 26 & 27, 2016

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Genesis 3:4–7 (NRSV)

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ **Then the eyes of both were opened,** and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Luke 24:13–35 (CEB)

¹³ On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. ¹⁶ They were prevented from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He said to them, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” They stopped, their faces downcast.

¹⁸ The one named Cleopas replied, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?”

¹⁹ He said to them, “What things?”

They said to him, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. ²⁰ But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.

²¹ We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. ²² But there’s more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ and didn’t find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn’t see him.”

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. ²⁶ Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.

²⁸ When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. ²⁹ But they urged him, saying, “Stay with us. It’s nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ **Their eyes were opened** and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?”

³³ They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying to each other, “The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

What does Easter mean to you? How much does it shape the way you understand and live your own life? Do you grasp that nothing has been the same for 2,000 years!

Hallelujah! Christ is risen. It is Easter Sunday. And this week, we conclude our series, *Keeping the Feast*, with the story of two meals. A meal of ruin and a meal of redemption.

The Ruin of Creation

The first meal in the Bible is one piece of fruit shared by Eve and Adam. This was not just any fruit, but fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden called Eden. It was the one thing forbidden them in the garden. But they chose to trust a snake rather than God and ate the fruit. And their eyes were opened. And what did they see? Only

their own nakedness and shame. This was a meal of sin and death, a meal that doomed God's good creation and all humanity to lives of suffering and hardship. For the choice made by Adam and Eve is the same choice we make, the same choice made by all those who came before us – with one exception. And it is to him that we turn.

The Rebirth of Creation

Cleopas and his wife had wandered around since Friday afternoon. Jesus, their teacher, their Lord, their beloved, had perished in a terrible maelstrom of suffering. Now, on Sunday afternoon, they undertook the walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Not a long walk as distance goes, but a hard walk through the Judean hills and forests west of the great city.

As they walked, they talked yet again about what had happened. How could it be? What did it mean? Had all their hopes come to nothing but blood and pain? But their contemplation was interrupted when they were joined by a stranger. One who seemed to have no knowledge of what had been going on during Passover; pretty darn clueless it seemed to Cleopas and Mary, but, nonetheless, they filled him in, even telling him the strange story from that morning. It seemed that the tomb of Jesus had been empty when the women arrived there to finish their work and they claimed that angels had said he was alive. Really? As Cleopas and Mary told the stranger their confusion was evident.

Suddenly, the stranger turned on them, upbraiding them for being so clueless themselves. Didn't they understand and trust the writings of the prophets? Couldn't they grasp that the Messiah hadn't come to rescue Israel *from* suffering, but *through* suffering? So he set about to help them see the truth of Israel's scriptures in a way they never had before.

When the three of them arrived at the village, the stranger motioned that he was going on alone. But Cleopas and Mary were good people, careful to be hospitable, and had learned something of their Master's way. So they prevailed upon the stranger to stay and dine with them in their home. In fact, they would provide him shelter overnight.

So the man stayed. As they began to eat, he took the bread Mary had set on the table, lifted it heavenward, blessed the meal, tore the loaf, and offered it to his hosts. Cleopas and Mary were both quite famished, so they hurriedly took a piece of the bread and bit it into.

And as they enjoyed that first bite, *their eyes were opened*. Unlike Adam and Eve whose eyes had been opened to a ruined creation, marked by hurt and loss, Mary and Cleopas could see the rebirth of creation, its utter redemption and renewal. What had been lost had

The Empty Tomb

Luke tells the story of the empty tomb in a single paragraph. Here are the basics. At dawn on Sunday, the women returned to the tomb in which they had laid Jesus' body. There, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb emptied! In a moment of understatement, Luke writes that the women were "perplexed" (meaning something like 'at a complete loss').

Little wonder they were at a loss. John tells us that Mary Magdalene assumed, naturally enough, that Jesus' body had been taken (John 20:13). After all, Mary knew, as do we, that the dead stay dead, that death is a one-way street. Surely, if Jesus' body was gone then someone took it.

But an angel tells the women, "He is not here, he has risen." Jesus had passed through death to life-after-death and through that to 'life after life-after-death' – to resurrection.

We need to be clear about this. Jesus' followers would not go on to claim that Jesus had been resuscitated; i.e., merely restored to a mortal life. Jesus had brought Lazarus back to life (John 11), but Lazarus had still gone on to die at some point. Lazarus had been resuscitated by Jesus, but not resurrected. The words simply don't mean the same thing.

Having been visited by the risen Jesus in the weeks after his resurrection, his followers would proclaim that in Jesus, God had begun the great resurrection of all people. Later, Paul would call Jesus the "first-fruits" of this great resurrection. Jesus was first and one day, upon his return, we will all follow.

now been found. All this realized in a moment, as their minds absorbed the fact . . . the indisputable fact . . . that the stranger was none other than Jesus. They had been blind to him before, but now they could see more clearly than they had ever seen anything in their entire lives. Culpepper writes:

Cleopas and his companion [probably his wife Mary] discovered at the table that their traveling companion was the Lord himself. They had not planned it as a sacred moment, but in the act of sharing their bread with a stranger they recognized the risen Lord in the fellow traveler. In a fascinating way, the Emmaus story is the counterpart to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In that parable, the rich man feasts daily but never notices the beggar at his gate or shares his bread with him. From Hades he pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers, but Abraham responds, “They have Moses and the prophets,” and when the rich man persists, Abraham’s final word is, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (16:31). Here again is a story that involves Moses and the prophets and resurrection from the dead, and a story that pivots at the table. The difference between them is what happens at the table. Cleopas and his companion share their table with a stranger and discover that they have been in the presence of the Lord. The rich man took no notice of the beggar until he was in torment in Hades. Fantasize for a moment. What might the rich man have discovered if he had shared his bread with Lazarus?¹

Just a fact

Cleopas and Mary hardly finished their meal before getting up to head for Jerusalem in the chilly night air. How could they sit at home even a few hours when the whole world had changed? They had to be with their friends and fellow disciples. They had hardly walked into the room to join the other disciples, when Jesus, with whom Cleopas and Mary had been eating just a few hours before, also arrived in the room.

Nothing would ever be the same. Nothing. How could it be. Jesus had not been merely resuscitated only to face death again, as would Lazarus. No, Jesus had passed through death to a newly embodied life. He even looked a bit different. Still a body that could eat, but transformed somehow.

What did it mean? That all Jesus had said and had done was to be understood in light of his resurrection. Indeed, the Day of the Lord had arrived in him and the great resurrection of the dead had begun. These believers and generations more would take a long time working all this out. But the fact of it was not to be denied. Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and buried, had been resurrected by God to new life. What had gone so terribly in that garden long before had now been put right. Where there was hate there would now be love, where there was loss there would now be gain, where there was death there would now be life, eternal life, resurrected life.

M. Craig Barnes wrote, “To say that Jesus is risen from the dead is not to say that he has returned to his earthly life. That was gone. It was dead. To say that Jesus is risen from the dead is to say that God reached into that tomb and into history, lifting Jesus up to new life. And it is to say that God will do the same thing for us.”²

Such a thing cannot be tamed, no matter how many Easter eggs we hide. Easter ought to jolt us, shake us up! We all stress ourselves out trying to cling to things that we cannot keep, whether it is our youth or our money or our time. All this will pass.

But . . . if we keep our eyes focused on the new life that God gives, a life that will not end, we can live our present life as we were created to live it – loving God and loving neighbor, enjoying and sharing God’s good, renewed, and redeemed creation. All this because . . . He is risen!! Jesus lives!!

¹ Culpepper, R. A. (1994–2004). The Gospel of Luke. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 9, p. 482). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

²from “We’re all terminal” in *The Christian Century*, April 6, 2004. Craig Barnes is professor of ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, Matthew 27:57–28:15 Matthew's account of Jesus' burial and resurrection.	Tuesday, Mark 15:42–16:8 Mark's account. The original ending of Mark has probably been lost. Neither the "shorter" nor "longer" ending in your Bible is the original.
Wednesday, Luke 24:36–49 What happens after Cleopas and Mary get back to the other disciples.	Thursday, John 20:19–21:24 More about Jesus' post-resurrection work with his disciples.
Friday, 1 Corinthians 15 Paul's great chapter on the resurrection of Jesus and our own.	Weekly Joys and Concerns

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We are studying Paul's letter, 1 Corinthians

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are beginning the book of Judges

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

No Class on Easter Sunday

Beginning Next Sunday:

Making Sense of Revelation: The Theology of John's Apocalypse

Sermon Notes
