

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

3 Easter  
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Fr. Bill McGinty

## “The Road to Emmaus”

In today’s Gospel “The Road to Emmaus” the disciples do not recognize Jesus as he joins them and travels with them on their journey. As yet, they do not describe Jesus as the Messiah. They only say that he was a great prophet and that their hopes rested with him as the possible redeemer of Israel.

The story of the Road to Emmaus, is enormously popular. It is popular because the disciples are unknown in the Gospel story. This is the only time they appear. All their reactions are normal and expected. The story begins with them talking about the events of the last three days, much the same as we would talk about the happening surrounding “Thanksgiving” or some other major holiday.

The story poses an intriguing question for all of us. Would we recognize Jesus, if he entered our life and journeyed with us till nightfall? We would all hope the answer to that question was “yes” but we really couldn’t be absolutely sure. More importantly, would we know with absolute certainty that Jesus, the Lord, would recognize each of us as his disciples?

Jesus’ walk with the two disciples begins with a history lesson. He home schools them on 1300 years of Jewish history. He takes them step by step, stage by stage through the Old Testament prophets. He teaches them the signs and symbols that decode the promise of the Messiah.

The disciples eventually recognize Jesus in the “breaking of bread” as they sit with him at the table. The Gospel records them as saying: “Were not our hearts burning within us, while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

From time to time, we all experience that sensation of having our hearts “burning within us” whether it is listening to a favorite singer, song or inspirational speaker. But the Gospel speaks of the joy that comes from the “Word of God” and its meaning. It accurately describes a feeling people have when the words of scripture are no longer mere words on a page, but have finally found a home in the heart. Jesus in his ministry taught this lesson to his Apostles and disciples in the story of the Sower. He told them that the precious seed of his word can only grow, when it finds a home and sinks its roots in deep soil. If it cannot do so, it will die. The word of God will always die unless it is nurtured, watered and cultivated.

The question of what we do with the gift of God’s word, surfaced again in 2007 at the National Convention of the Episcopal Church. In passing a motion that it is the

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obligation of every church member to adopt “Holy Habits” the delegates of convention expressed the view that regular attendance at Eucharist, praying morning and evening prayer; studying the Bible daily and practicing acts of charity, kindness and Christian service were some of the ways Episcopalians can do this.

The motion passed unanimously and has since been adopted by every Episcopal Diocese. In itself, it pre-supposes a rhetorical question: “How can you grow the word of God and keep it burning in your heart if you have never read it, never bother to study it, or make it the major driving force of your life?” You cannot do so. St Paul tells us over and over: “There is no such thing as the luke warm Christian.” He castigates the Corinthians because they use their church as a social club and have no regard for the Gospel and the word of God. He tells them that in doing so, they are calling down upon themselves the wrath of God. “We must,” says Paul, “live lives that are beyond reproach. We must pray continually to our heavenly Father for the grace to be free of sin and hold fast to the truth he has given us.”

The admonition to practice “holy habits” is the instruction that Paul gives us to walk in grace. “Christ has died for you,” he tells the Romans in Chapter 8, “will you not now know that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is now living in you?”

It is our awareness of what Christ has done for each one of us that leads us to protect and grow the seed of his word. We do that by how we live and proclaim that word. Whether we are aware of it or not each of us is tied up with Evangelism. None of us are allowed to take the treasure of God’s word and bury it in the ground; instead we are asked to teach it, proclaim it and spread it to others.

In the beginning of the 10-th century, the most Christian place in the whole of Britain was the city and county of Gloucester. The city sits on the River Seven, the longest river in England. In the 10 century it was famous for its Monastery and beside it Glouceter Abbey the most beautiful church in the whole of Europe. Gloucester was a place of pilgrimage not just because of its great cathedral, but because it had its own saint. His name was Dunstan. Dunstan was the wisest and holiest of monks in all England, and a man of great learning. Dunstan was also an expert on calligraphy and art.

He became the Abbot of Glastonbury in 943 and was responsible for a great monastic revival. Later he was to become Bishop of London and then Archbishop of Canterbury. Dunstan’s legacy was that he truly lived the faith and the Gospel he believed in. He repuked kings and Queens for their evil ways and for straying from their Christian duties. Many times his life was threatened. Once he was beaten so badly, thrown into a cesspool, that he almost died. Dunstan survived to live a great life of service to his people. When eventually he did die on May 19 988, he was accepted by all as a saintly man and canonized in 1029.

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Dunstan was so revered and loved by the people of England that many legends grew up around his life story. he is reputed to have had many celebrated fights and verbal confrontations with the devil. Each time he performed an exorcism in a house, church or other building these events would occur. Legend says that one day he got so mad with the devil that he nailed a horseshoe to the devil's hoof, refusing to remove it till the devil made a promise. The promise was never again to enter any house that had a horseshoe nailed above the door.

It may well be a legend, but next time you are in England check out how many horseshoes you still can see above doors!

Today's Gospel implores us to recognize Jesus in the 'Breaking of Bread'. It is a short-hand for saying: that Christ will appear in the most unexpected places in your life. You will see him in the faces of neighbors, strangers, the sick, the poor and the despised. Like Dunstan, who was a great champion of the poor, we will only recognize Christ in others when we choose to live with him within ourselves.

Let us pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, come among us in the Breaking of the Bread.  
Remain with us to teach us your word.  
Send us forth to walk in your grace,  
And to see your face in the passing of strangers."

Amen+

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