

“Eyes to See”

I Corinthians 13:8-13; Luke 24:13-35 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – April 27, 2025
Stewardship Campaign 2025-2026 ~ “Unrevealed Until Its Season”

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might clear our eyes to see you, in every stranger, in every friend, every time we break bread. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I'm not sure why you would ever need to know this, but in case you're ever in a situation where you come into a room to tell me something, and I don't have my glasses on, you're going to need to walk right up to me in order for me to hear anything you say. Or if you have to stay on the other end of the room, just holler for me to put my glasses back on first. I'm pretty sure this happens to other people too, but I can't explain it: if you're not right in front of me, I will not be able to process what you're saying if I don't have my glasses on. I don't think it's because I'm reading lips. It just feels like my eyes and my ears just work together more closely than one might guess.

I bring this up because I think something similar was happening to Cleopas and his friend as they were walking to Emmaus. We say that we have five senses, and even though we know the line between taste and smell is fuzzy, we tend to think of them as working fairly independently. Spiritually, I would guess we have more than five senses, but I also think that it's basically impossible to separate them one from another. There was a reason those two disciples couldn't see what was right in front of their

eyes. And it wasn't that their eyes were working right. Paul was right: when you look into a mirror, at night, without any lights on, you can't see much, even if you know what's there. And if you didn't know what was there, you might not be able to see anything beyond your own nose.

There are important lessons for us here, as we prepare to welcome God's future for Vista La Mesa Christian Church and figure out our individual places within it. So let's go through this story and see what we can learn. The story of the walk to Emmaus may be my very favorite Easter story. For a Disciples pastor, that's probably not surprising, since it's the one in which Jesus is revealed "in the breaking of the bread." Anything that brings it back to the Table is going to make us happy, right? But let's start at the beginning. One thing that is interesting to me is that at the beginning of this story, Cleopas and his friend – let's call her Phoebe – have a lot of words. They were "talking and discussing," it says. And when Jesus asks them what's going on, they have even more words, words covering more of the story than we might should expect. These disciples are sad. That might make us assume they had left town before Mary and the other women got back from the tomb. But that's not what they say. They know that the women had found the tomb empty. They even know that some men had then gone to the tomb and also found it empty. Yet, somehow, this knowledge has given them no hope. It's like the eyes of their hearts had been covered with lenses of sadness, making them unable to see anything that doesn't fit with their narrative of despair.

Early on, that narrative gets interrupted, and they don't quite know what to do with that. Cleopas and Phoebe are "talking and discussing," and when Jesus interrupts to ask what they're talking about, for a moment, all they can do is "stand still, looking sad." But then, of course, they turn back to their words, explaining to Jesus everything that happened to him, because "What?! Have you been dead for the past three days, stranger? Or living under a rock or something? Everybody knows what's going on!"

So many words, so little understanding! They could not see what was right in front of them, because those lenses of sadness were blinding them. But what happened next? Instead of continuing to run their mouths, they opened their ears. It turns out that sometimes, in order to see, we have to start with listening. It's not that they didn't know the scriptures; it's that they needed the scriptures opened to them. Not just to their eyes and their minds, but to their ears and their hearts. they may have still been looking into a mirror, but it's like Jesus turned on a lamp.

This is our first lesson today for how to prepare for God's future: we have to bring our whole selves. We cannot just look; we must also listen. We cannot simply read; we must feel. We cannot assume; we must experience. And more, we will not be best prepared for God's future if we do it alone. It's not just bringing our whole selves as individuals, but bringing together the whole self of the body of Christ, so that we can listen to every perspective and learn from what everyone has experienced.

In these days after Easter, we must learn to attune our ears to the stories of those who are grieving, those who are afraid, those who are rarely believed unless someone more legitimate corroborates their story. We must wipe the scales of bias and cynicism and despair from our eyes so that we can see more clearly what God is placing in front of us. Sometimes the future God is revealing is already here, and God is just waiting for us to recognize it!

The second lesson I want to emphasize today really comes more from the reading from First Corinthians 13 than it does from this story, but I think the actions of Cleopas and Phoebe reflect it well. That whole chapter, but especially the part we heard today, is trying to convince us of one thing: that Love is the most complete reality we have access to. You want to know what's real? Love is real. You want to know what will last? Love will last. You want to know what matters? Love matters. You want to know what to do? Do Love. You want to know what the future will bring? Love is the future. You want to know about the beginning or the end or the in-between? Love is and was and ever shall be. Love is the Beginning and the End. Love is now. You want to be able to see in that mirror more clearly? Shine the light of Love on it!

The eyes of Cleopas and Phoebe were almost open. They had slowed down their own words in order to listen to the words of a stranger. And it helped them re-ground themselves in the most complete reality they knew, which was Love. So as their journey was ending, as night approached, the Love that held them compelled

them to prolong their opportunity for revelation. “Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and the day is now nearly over.” And here is our third lesson, which emerges from the second. When we are grounded in Love, generosity flows from our souls and transforms reality. When the church is grounded in Love, hospitality is our way of life, and it transforms our world. Because what happens when we join together to break the bread? The Risen Christ is revealed! The day dawns, and we can see clearly, face to face. “Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again, pass the Word around: loaves abound!”

If we want to be part of the future God is preparing, we will need to start by bringing our whole selves, not just as individuals, but as a community. We will need to see clearly, to listen carefully, and to feel and respond authentically. We will need to ground ourselves in Love as deeply and truthfully as we can, engaging in practices of hospitality with grace and generosity. Whatever season we may be living through, that Love will carry us forward. Whatever unfolds for us as a community, that Love will never end. We will continue to break the bread, and the Risen Christ will be alive in our midst, now and forevermore. Hallelujah and Amen!