

## **EASTER: A TIME TO REJOICE**

**Third Sunday of Easter  
April 6, 2008**

**Acts 2:14a, 36-41**

**Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19**

**1 Peter 1:17-23**

**Luke 24:13-15**

### **An Encounter with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus**

Luke is a master storyteller. This is especially evident in today's Gospel text, a story the other Gospel writers either did not know or chose to omit from their accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. The events unfold in a quiet but engaging manner, and Luke gives his readers just enough information about the two disciples for us to identify with their "humanness." In addition, Luke is centuries ahead of his time in understanding the psychological makeup of people who are grieving or have experienced trauma.

Cleopas and his companion are followers of Jesus, though neither one is from Jesus' "inner circle," the Twelve. But like the eleven remaining apostles, Mary Magdalene, and other unnamed disciples, they had been in Jerusalem when Jesus was tried, executed, and buried in a tomb. Like them, they grieved over the loss of the One they had hoped would rescue Israel from the tyranny of Roman rule. Like them, they had seen—if only from a distance—the death of their beloved teacher by one of the cruelest and most humiliating methods ever invented. Like them, they were shocked and baffled by the disappearance of their Lord's body from his tomb within days of his burial. Is it any wonder that they wanted to retreat from Jerusalem to the small and easily overlooked town of Emmaus to "process" what they had just experienced?

"Retreat" is an interesting word. In military terms, it suggests a desperate but necessary withdrawal from combat. Spiritually, it suggests time alone with God or a time to reflect on the direction of one's life. Both military and spiritual retreats are sometimes prejudged by others to be cowardly or wrongly motivated.

It is impossible to know what these disciples' retreat would have been like had the risen Jesus not joined them, inquired about their distress, explained from the Scriptures why the Messiah had to suffer and die, and accepted their invitation to stay and share a meal. It was in the intimacy of this fellowship meal, with gestures they likely would have recognized from the time Jesus fed the five thousand, that the two disciples came to realize that it was indeed Jesus with whom they had been conversing. The powerful experience of Jesus' presence gave new meaning and legitimacy to the words they had heard Jesus previously speak. "When he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us," they reflected, "didn't it warm our hearts?" Fortified by Jesus'

appearance, encouraged by his words, and emboldened by a renewed sense of hope, the pair return to Jerusalem to report the good news to Jesus' other disciples.

“Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”

With Peter and the other witnesses to the resurrection, Jesus' followers remain in Jerusalem—to become a tightly knit community with an important message to share—and await the Helper Jesus promised to send.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Charles Houser who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Editorial and Publications Manager in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Syria** – With thanks to God for the many opportunities for Scripture distribution despite regional turmoil, and with prayers for God's protection for the team, for God's guidance in bringing physical and spiritual help to Iraqi refugees, for the opening of the new Christian Resource Center in Damascus, for Bible Day programs organized by the Catholic Church and for the vast distribution programs taking place; **Lebanon** – With thanks to God that God's Word endures forever although difficult times come and go, for the *Relief & Scriptures* program that continues to bring physical and spiritual help to many displaced people, and with prayers for new publications, Bible-based television productions, and the radio broadcasts of God's Word; **Cyprus** – With thanks to God for the good functioning of the Bible Society under the present structure and for the good cooperation among all the churches on the island, for the 10,000 New Testaments given to the Ministry of Education for free distribution to all schools in the country, and for the 10,000 copies of camouflage-edition New Testaments that were distributed free to the Army.

**Activity Corner:** “Jesus Walks With Me” Mural

Supplies needed: Bible; sheet from a roll of brown wrapping paper (approximately 5 ft. long); construction paper (assorted colors); scissors; glue, pens/pencils; markers.

Across the top of the mural write verse 9 from Psalm 116: **I walk before the LORD in the land of the living.** Ask everyone to trace their footprints on construction paper. On one footprint, ask each member of your household to write: Jesus walks with me and helps me ... (finish the sentence with one or two thoughts). On the second footprint, ask each one to write: I walk with Jesus and I will be his disciple by ... (finish the sentence with one or two thoughts). Affix everyone's footprints to the mural and display the mural where you gather for family devotions as a reminder throughout the week to walk each day with Jesus. If you have access to the poem, “Footprints,” invite a member of your household to read the poem during your family devotional time. Conclude by reading together Psalm 116 and singing “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me” or “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” or “O Master Let Me Walk With You” or one of your favorite Easter hymns.