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*Known by His Gratitude*  
Luke 24:13-35

Sometimes people assume we will be able to recognize a new item, which may be well known to them, the first time we see it. When I lived in the low part of South Carolina, several minister friends and I would float the South Edisto River each Spring and Fall. Putting in near Denmark, we would float thirty-five miles of the uniquely black water through cypress trees to our stopping point just at the junction of the North and South Edisto Rivers. A member of my congregation in Blackville owned the land and had a cabin at the center point where the two rivers came together. Two of us would leave a vehicle at the cabin the day before we made the ten to twelve-hour river trip. The cabin could not be seen from the main body of the enlarging river. You had to know the precise one hundred-yard cut to take to carry you to the hidden cabin.

My member, Bobby Collins, owned the cabin and offered it to our group as a sleep-over before returning the next day. "How will I know which inlet to take after thirty-five miles of shore line and ten hours of travel?"

Bobby gave a few details that concluded with, "You'll recognize it when you get there. You can't miss it."

When the gospel of Luke was written, forty years had passed since Jesus' death. For almost all of his readers, Jesus was a second-hand experience. "How will we recognize the resurrected Christ when we see him?" was a viable question of those first-century followers.

One of the post-resurrection scenarios in Luke is the famous story of two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection. A stranger joins the two as they are walking. Not recognizing the stranger as the resurrected Christ, the two disciples begin telling this stranger all that happened in the recent days about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. When they came to the village of Emmaus and the stranger continued as though he was walking on, the two compelled him to stay with them and eat at their table. It

wasn't until this stranger took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them that they recognized this one to be the risen Christ.

Many have tried to understand the strangeness of the story. Taking the event completely literal is to miss some of the richness meant to stir the hearts of followers Luke was writing to some forty years after the death of Jesus.

One of the questions that Luke may have been addressing by including this story in his gospel might have been, "How do we recognize the risen Christ among us?" The question was important enough that the writer of the gospel of Matthew included the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) to answer that question. In Matthew's parable, Jesus said, "You will recognize me in the faces of those who are hungry, sick, in prison, without clothing, a stranger needing friendship, those who are thirsty."

For Luke's audience, he is saying we will recognize the risen Christ in those who live by gratitude. The two disciples, perhaps a married couple, didn't recognize him in the normal conversation as they walked. They took this stranger into their home and invited him to sit at their table. Perhaps, it was in the way he handled the bread.

*... their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us? (24:32)*

One of the things so unusual about Jesus was his attitude toward everything in life. He took nothing for granted. Every person, every object, every act that happened was important. Jesus didn't just look at an object, person, or event and ask, "What is this?" He looked beyond all of life and asked, "Why is this?"

For this reason, he could see value in places and people and events when everyone else walked blindly by. On one occasion while Jesus was teaching, a group of children gathered close to him. Immediately, the disciples sought to rid the audience of the children. But, Jesus' quick response was to say, "Let them stay. Of such is the kingdom of God." The "least of these" was as important as the rest of these in Jesus mind.

On another occasion, Jesus was moving through a crowd making his way to the home of Jarius when he paused. "Someone touched me. Who was it?"

“Many people are touching you, Lord,” his disciples responded.  
“Everyone is pressing against us. We need to move on,” they encouraged.”

“Someone touched me. I felt it,” he insisted.

“I did,” a woman confessed. “I touch the hem of your clothing. I only thought that if I could touch you I would be healed.”

“You are healed. Your faith has made you whole,” Jesus responded.

Jesus took nothing for granted, not even the slightest touch of someone in a crowd, and at a time when other important issues were pressing upon him.

How different he was from most of us who take so much for granted—our friends, our health, our freedoms, our opportunities.

We take our eyesight for granted until someone close to us loses their ability to see. We take our children for granted until a close friend loses her child in an accident. We take our ability to walk, work, and play until a neighbor has a premature stroke at forty-eight, impairing mobility, cognition, and speech.

Whether it was watching fishermen at work, attending a banquet of the not-so-holy citizens, or a small boy’s two fish and five loaves, Jesus seemed to take nothing for granted. He had an incredible ability to be fully present, no matter where he was or what was going on. How did Jesus do it?

I think he asked “why” rather than asking “what.” Jesus looked behind the surface of events, people, and requests in his life to see the deeper implications. That enabled him to live with a sense of expectancy and appreciation.

Two weeks ago, clergy in our area gathered for a breakfast at Schooners. Part of the reason for the meeting was to meet with the new director of United Campus Ministries and help the group get off to a good start as students returned. As the new director of United Campus Ministries made an appeal for attendance at another meeting of clergy, you could see the mental response: “One more meeting for the week.” When someone finally asked “why are we needing to meet?” the director responded, “President Tribble and his wife want to unveil the plans for the new chapel and tell you about it.” I heard a low voice say, “Oh, that makes a difference.”

Learning the source of things and events doesn't change them, but it can add a new dimension of understanding and appreciation. "How will we recognize the risen Christ when we see him?" some asked.

After thirty-five miles of South Edisto River and ten hours on that first of many trips, in the diminishing late afternoon light we recognized the inlet to the cabin and avoided being carried farther than the river in the night's current. Most of the time, I recognize true gratitude in a person's life and in doing so get a glimpse of the risen Christ.

Jesus was known to some by his gratitude for everything that gives meaning to life. Even a loaf of bread. If that could happen to each of us this day, His joy would become our own joy.

All of us are invited to his table. He invites all who trust him to take the bread and cup and learn how to bless it.

### **Prayer**

*For the simplest of things in life, O Lord, teach us their true value. AMEN.*

### **Luke 24:13-35**

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles\* from Jerusalem,<sup>14</sup> and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.<sup>15</sup> While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,<sup>16</sup> but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.<sup>17</sup> And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad.\*<sup>18</sup> Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'<sup>19</sup> He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth,\* who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,<sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.<sup>21</sup> But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.\* Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,<sup>23</sup> and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.<sup>24</sup> Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'<sup>25</sup> Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!<sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Messiah\* should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.<sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them.<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.<sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.<sup>32</sup> They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us\* while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'<sup>33</sup> That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.<sup>34</sup> They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!'<sup>35</sup> Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.