

The little town of Emmaus is only about 7 miles outside of Jerusalem, but for Cleopas and another disciple the distance really did not matter. The events of Passover were over, the three days of waiting are passed. Positive messages are astounding but are not grasped and now, in the midst of the seven mile journey home, these two shattered followers of Jesus are sad.

Kate Douglas Wiggin, in a 1907 book called *The Chronicles of Rebecca*, writes that there is a kind of magic "about going far away and then back all changed." But it is not always magic. Sometimes to go home is to go back tinged with a great sense of loss. How many troops, for example, returning home, know "home" as a place of dislocation? And then there is that writer Thomas Wolfe telling us most famously that we cannot go home again.

Yet these two followers persist in their journey. And when Jesus joins them, a stranger unperceived, they tell him the story of their master, their prophet condemned to death and crucified, and the sadness of their predicament comes through in the simple phrase *we had hoped*.

*We had hoped... But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*

There are places in our lives, also, where we feel that we have to go home and yet the journey is impossibly sad. Places where we might also use the phrase, *but we had hoped*. It is a phrase from the ICU or the ER when families pack things up and go home alone. Or when addictions return. Or when we leave the office with a difficult diagnosis. Or when promising careers or jobs disappear. It is the human phrase forged in times of tragedy, reversal and loss.

The rabbi and scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel has written *prayer begins when our power ends*. And so I suppose that these two followers, powerless, are in prayer, perhaps without realizing it. For there are formed

prayers and formal prayers; and then there are those deep sighs of which St Paul speaks when he writes in Romans 8: *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness: for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

They travel on and their companion joins them in an unfolding conversation.

Finally they arrive: *he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."* This sense of urgency and yearning is preserved for us in the concluding Collect for Daily Devotions -- In the Early Evening (139). Here the Greek verb for stay communicates a sense of desperate urging; a sense of arm twisting that comes to us as well when we want more of what God would give us. More presence, more guidance, more disclosure. Stay.

And so he stays. And they go in together and sit at table, together. And here it is in this powerful account that we move from the body of Jesus, from his physical presence, to the presence of Jesus,, the body and the blood, captured in the bread and in the cup of wine. Captured without explanation except the words, *This is my body which is given for you; this is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for you.*

Note the movement. The great shift in this passage. It comes quickly: *When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; [and note the next phrase] and he vanished from their sight.*

On the road to Emmaus, at the table, in the breaking of the bread there is both recognition and disappearance. Jesus vanishes from their sight, yet he remains: He continues to be known to them in the breaking of the bread.

In writing about prayer, Abraham Joshua Heschel also has said: *To pray is to dream in league with God; to envision His holy visions.*

Early on, the followers of Jesus as Messiah, Anointed One understood that the Spirit and presence of Jesus was to be found in the breaking of bread and in the pouring of wine.

It has persisted through the centuries. And in our hymnody:

*Let us break bread together on our knees.*

*O taste and see, Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.*

*Here O my Lord I see Thee face to face, here would I touch and handle things unseen.*

*Come, risen Lord and deign to be our guest; nay, let us be thy guests the feast is Thine.*

Sometimes we sense the fullness in coming to the altar, our eyes are opened and we see him in the breaking of the bread. Sometimes we wait. We come in faithfulness and we wait. In those times, I am reminded of St Paul's writing about hope: *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* There are times when we wait.

But this meal is more than we are and more than our perceptions and our confessions. Nevertheless, consider these reflections:

*The Eucharist is the sacrament of cosmic remembrance: it is indeed a restoration of love as the very life of the world. -- Alexander Schmemmann*

*I could wish that no definitions had every been felt to be necessary; and, still more, that none had been allowed to make divisions between churches.*

--C.S. Lewis

*Living Eucharistically is living life as a gift, a gift for which one is grateful. But gratitude is not the most obvious response to life, certainly not when we experience life as a series of losses! Still, the great mystery we celebrate in the Eucharist and live in a Eucharistic life is precisely that through mourning our losses we come to know life as a gift. -- Henri Nouwen*

*I held the Host with two fingers and thought: How small Jesus made Himself, in order to show us that He doesn't expect great things of us, but rather little things with great love. -- Mother Teresa*

I close with the collect from the Daily Devotions for the Early Evening; Let us pray.

*Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of the bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.*