

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

April 19, 2026 – THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: *“Walking Together—With Christ”*

Acts 2:14a, 36-41 (St. Peter preaches, “Repent and be baptized!”)
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17 (I love the Lord and will fulfill my vows to Him)
1 Peter 1:17-23 (Having been ransomed by God’s love, we are to love one another)
St. Luke 24:13-35 (Two travelers encounter the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus)

It must have been the longest day of their life. They were going home. Home, because there was nothing else to do. Their hopes were dashed. Their dreams destroyed. Their future obliterated. They were forlorn, and there was nothing for them to do but return to Emmaus, lick their wounds, and try to figure out what to do with their lives now that Jesus was dead.

It was a two-to-three-hour walk along the almost 8-mile journey over a dusty road, with dirty feet and parched throats, weary bodies and empty spirits. Jesus has died. The One, they hoped and thought would save them from the Romans and redeem Israel. Cleopas and his companion feel as defeated as Jesus must have when they nailed Him on a cross to die and laid Him in a cold, dark tomb. Can you imagine that kind of emptiness inside, that numbness in your soul? Perhaps you, too, have felt this at some time—such sadness and loss, you wondered, “What’s the point of living?”*

Imagine being so crushed by despair and weighed down by hopelessness that your mind, your heart, your eyes of faith are closed, and there’s no possible way you’d recognize Jesus, even if He joined you on your journey? You’re walking together, you and your friend, down that long, lonely road, discussing what had happened, lamenting the dashing of your hopes, regretting that your joy in following Jesus had now been turned to bitter sorrow, recalling His mighty deeds, and your hope in Him. And now He was dead, dead, dead. Yes, you have each other, but you are together only in your grief and despair. Then suddenly, you’re joined by a stranger. “Oh, not now, please. *We are in mourning.* We don’t feel like chatting with some random guy.”

Because their faith has been shattered, their hope destroyed, and they feel they have no future, they utterly fail to recognize Jesus. This is a constant theme throughout many of the evangelists’ accounts of the Resurrection: Even Christ’s closest followers did not recognize Him at first—Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb; Thomas gathered with the disciples; and now, these two followers of Jesus from Emmaus. Why this disconnect? Could it be that they—and we—only see what we want to, what is consistent with our expectations and understanding? And thereby, we miss the miraculous and Jesus’ presence among us?

The stranger begins a conversation. Incredibly, He has no idea what you’ve experienced. All of Jerusalem knows, but this guy seems clueless. So you unburden yourself about your heartache, your destroyed hopes and your empty future, all because Jesus has died. The stranger starts expounding about the Old Testament—the only Scriptures you and Cleopas would have known. He invites you to remember how God has worked in the past, worked through the suffering of people like Moses and the prophets, and the mysterious suffering servant of Isaiah. “Hasn’t God brought victory and redemption through that suffering?” the stranger asks. “Couldn’t God do that again? Couldn’t this Jesus be God’s Messiah, and couldn’t His suffering not be the end, but God’s way of establishing God’s rule in the world and in human hearts?”

And as the stranger talks to both of you, something begins to break loose inside, but you won’t understand it until later. Your heart starts to burn, this time not with heartache, not with pain, not with grief—but with a twinge of hope, a shiver of joy. And you wonder what it all means.

The three of you are still walking together when you come to your village of Emmaus. By then, it's sunset, time to find food and shelter for the evening. Where will the stranger stay tonight? Following the custom of the day, you and Cleopas invite him in to receive your hospitality. You sit down to eat, and then something peculiar—yet spectacular—happens!

The guest becomes the host! The stranger takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to you. And now you know. Now you understand why your heart was on fire with joy and hope as you walked together with the stranger and discussed the Scriptures. This is no stranger! This is *Jesus*, and He is alive, not dead! Moreover, He has come to be with you and is sitting at your table!

Jesus *is* alive, and as He came to be with Cleopas and his companion in His crucified and risen glory, He has come to His Church, founding it on His own resurrected self. He has come to His Church to be with *us* in the opening of God's Word to our hearts and the breaking of the bread at *our* table.

Once Cleopas and his companion knew Jesus was alive, they ran back to Jerusalem to tell the others: "We've seen Him! He's alive! He's appeared to us in the Word and the meal!" Since we share their awareness and, hopefully, their excitement about Christ having been raised from the dead, does that make *us* run and tell others the good news?

Rescued, redeemed, and made whole in Jesus, what else can we do but walk together, joining with one another to offer God our best in praise and then witness to and serve others! All because of Word and Sacrament, and the One present in them—that day long ago in Emmaus—and here today in Compass.

"Walking together." Did you know that's the literal translation of one of those odd Greek words the Church uses: "*synod*"? It means an assembly of church members. Walking together with millions in our own faith tradition. Walking together with billions of Christians of all traditions around the globe—many of whom are severely persecuted and dying for their faith. As Christ's Church we are walking together to support, strengthen, and encourage one another, and to do together what we cannot do by ourselves. Walking together to tell the world that in Word and Sacrament, Christ is present, and gives himself to the world for its salvation, healing, and peace.

As the late French philosopher Albert Camus—although not a Christian—wrote so poignantly:

Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow.

Don't walk behind me; I may not lead.

Walk beside me and be my friend.

And as we continue to walk together, there is One in the lead—Jesus. As the One who is 100% trustworthy, we can follow Him with confidence and joy. He invites us to walk together, not only as friends, but as brothers and sisters in the Lord, as the Church for which He died and rose again. Walking together. Following Christ. Gathered for Word and Sacrament. Our hearts burn as we hear the Scriptures, our eyes open as we share the broken bread. Expressing our gratitude to God by witnessing to God's goodness and power, and serving God's world in the name of Christ. *Amen.*