

Sermon: Why Do We Need to Pay Attention?

Series: Believe and Encounter

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Date: April 26, 2026

Preacher: Rev. Jasiel Hernandez Garcia



The story begins with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, leaving Jerusalem behind them, step by step.

Their journey back home was not a simple, peaceful morning stroll under the shady trees as depicted in the covert art in our bulletin. In reality, the road to Emmaus was about seven miles of uneven road, where dust and heat rise with each step.

If you like long walks or hiking, you know that this is the kind of journey that stretches your body and makes you lose sense of time. Seven miles gives you plenty of time to let your body grow tired and your thoughts wander.

Seven miles of walking can easily become the arena where we wrestle with our thoughts and emotions. Sometimes in helpful ways, but often in ways that circle back on themselves. Long walks allow us to spend more time on ourselves. We finally find the space to reflect on the past, acknowledge the present moment, and tune back into the longings we have for the future.

This is the kind of walk Cleopas and his companion—who might have been a dear friend, a fellow disciple, perhaps even his spouse—engage in as they make their way back home.

But this is not a traditional, ordinary journey back home. This is so much more than that.

My friend and mentor, Pastor Chris Henry, points out how this pair of disciples are walking in the wrong direction. They are leaving Jerusalem - the place where the story is still unfolding. Emmaus then symbolizes the place where you go when you've already given up. To walk away from Jerusalem means letting despair and disappointment have the last word.

These two disciples are walking away from the horrendous events that just took place in Jerusalem.

Their prophet and Messiah is dead. And while they have heard that he may still be alive, they haven't received the official confirmation.

Their pace is probably slow, almost reluctant, as if each step away from Jerusalem is also a step away from the last place they saw hope alive.

Their conversation during this walk, as we're told, is constant. They are turning over the events again and again, trying to make sense of what doesn't make sense.

This scene is almost too familiar for many of us.

It is easy to remember those moments when we find ourselves pacing back and forth, replaying conversations in our head, second-guessing decisions, and even imagining different outcomes.

We can almost hear the questions in this conversation because they are ones we have asked ourselves at some point in life. "How could this happen?" "What did we miss?" "Why were we so naive to believe him?"

MOVE 1

Luke's writing gives us a clear description of the kind of conversation Cleopas and the other disciple were having.

At first, Luke uses the Greek word "homily" to describe the way they were talking to each other. We know this word, right? It simply means "to talk." We sometimes use this word to describe sermons that are shorter and more direct.

Luke then changes "homily" to "suzéteó" in the sentence that follows. This new word translates best as "arguing."

What we see happening is how Cleopas and the other disciple began talking about events from a few days earlier, but as the discussion intensified, they found themselves arguing with one another.

We have all been there.

Remember the last time you were having a pleasant conversation with someone, and suddenly it intensified to the point that it led to a major argument?

This often happens between my brother and me. I have previously shared with some of you that he serves as a worship pastor at a contemporary Baptist church in my hometown in Mexico. He is also in his last year of Seminary at a Baptist theological institution in Mexico.

Well, as you can imagine, he and I have many different opinions about ministry, and, most importantly, theology.

We often start a conversation with curiosity and end up in a heated debate about a particular church topic. We are now trying to avoid those conversations as much as we can.

I believe this is what's happening in our story.

Luke doesn't tell us what caused this argument between Cleopas and the other disciple. We don't know how their opinions were different or whether one of them remained hopeful while the other was about to give up on this Jesus character.

Again, all of us know what it's like to be in a conversation where two different viewpoints collide.

In a way, it makes sense that Cleopas and the other disciple would end up arguing with each other.

They are dealing with so many complex emotions and trying their best to process them.

The path they were walking was not only physically difficult but also emotionally charged. It was the walk of hopes in shambles. It was a walk through the valley of disillusionment. It was a walk burdened with perhaps anger, accusation, or even shame.

When we're carrying emotions this heavy, it's easy to slip into a defensive posture where our perspective feels like the only right one, and what we want to say or do begins to feel unquestionable.

It is in the heat of this moment, perhaps at the worst point of this argument, that Jesus appears to Cleopas and the other disciple.

I find this moment somewhat comical.

In an effort to avoid real-life stories, so no one feels called out, I am going to use a famous scene from the show, "Friends."

There is this one episode where Monica and Rachel are in a heated argument with Chandler and Joey over who knows each other better. The argument escalates into a full-on trivia contest, with Ross acting as quizmaster. Emotions are high, the stakes are ridiculous (they even bet their apartment), and everyone is shouting over each other.

And then, right in the middle of all that tension, there's a knock at the door.

A delivery person stands there, completely unaware of the emotional storm inside. And suddenly, everything changes. The shouting stops. Voices soften. Smiles appear. "Thank you so much," they say politely, as if nothing had just happened.

Unlike the delivery person in this episode, Jesus knows the intensity of the argument between Cleopas and the other disciple.

Jesus becomes the holy disruptor - the one who bridges our differences and brings us closer together once again.

I always found it a bit strange how Jesus appears out of nowhere to join this conversation, and Cleopas and the other disciple don't even question where Jesus came from or why he wants to talk to them.

Bible Scholar, Dr. Yidokolditona, shares the following: “In our arguments, many of them necessary and important, human beings risk losing sight of each other. The more heated our 'discussions' become, the more likely we are to disregard the human dimensions of our common journey.”

I can now recognize how Cleopas and the other disciple lost sight of Jesus because of their argument.

Their anger. Their disappointment. Their frustration. All of those things kept them from recognizing Jesus in their midst.

And the same applies to us.

It is not always that Jesus is absent. Sometimes, more often than we would like to acknowledge, we are too distracted by our anger, our disappointment, our frustrations, our unfulfilled dreams... These are the moments when our eyes fail to see Jesus in the world around us and in each other.

In this day and age, we have become so consumed with proving a point, defending our perspective at all costs, or holding on to our disappointments that we lose sight of Christ right in front of us.

But here is where the story stretches us even further. It is not just that we miss Jesus in the moment... it is that Jesus often chooses to meet us through one another.

And if our emotions, [our] thoughts, and [our] beliefs prevent us from seeing the *other* as a beloved child of God, worthy of having a conversation with, worthy of having a relationship with, we will never find Jesus in our midst.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote in *Life Together* that “Christ stands between us.” What he meant is that our relationships are not just social or incidental—they are sacred spaces where Christ chooses to dwell and be revealed.

In other words, if we want to encounter Jesus, we cannot neglect each other. We cannot let our arguments and differences keep us from seeing Christ in one another. We cannot let our anger, our frustration, our disappointment, our mourning for how things used to be keep us from recognizing Christ in those we encounter in our journey on this earth.

There is so much more that can be said about this popular story. The walk to Emmaus remains a vital text that we all need to revisit every so often because what's most wonderful about this story is how Cleopas and the other disciple finally recognize Jesus when they sit at the table together.

This doesn't happen while they are arguing, or while they are explaining their theology, or while recalling the events that had just taken place in Jerusalem, or while sharing more about their grief and disappointment.

Again, they recognize Jesus when they finally sit at the table together to break bread, share new stories, and build new bonds of friendship. That's where Jesus can be found.

Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen reminds us that hospitality is not just about being nice; it is about creating space where the stranger can become a friend, and the friend can reveal Christ to us.

Friends, the Emmaus story reminds us that we are called to notice Jesus in the stranger on the road. In the people we are tempted to overlook, dismiss, avoid, or even argue with.

Because the truth is: If we cannot see Jesus in one another, we may never be able to find him.

Jesus is our holy disruptor - the one who bridges our differences and brings us closer together once again.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, are we so bold and willing to let Jesus become the holy disruptor in our lives?

Amen.