

On the Road to Emmaus

Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35

Year A Easter 3 ; Year B
Easter 3

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	Nathanael - Phillip's crass bully of an older brother, who joins Jesus in search of redemption and nobler life	■		●		
■	Cleophas - A conscientious disciple whose faith briefly fails him after the death of Jesus	▲		▲	▲	
▲	Stranger - a mysterious traveler that two of the disciples encounter on the road	▲		●		
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲		▲	
▲	Andrew - the younger brother of Peter, one of the youngest disciples		▲		▲	
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲		●	
●	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples		●			
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room					▲
▲	Jesus					▲

Scene 1

Cleophas , Nathanael , Stranger

{Cleophas and Nathanael walk down the road to Emmaus.}

Nathanael I knew I shouldn't have listened to my brother. He's an idiot!

Cleophas We all believed in the rabbi - until...

Nathanael Until the phony got himself killed!

Cleophas I still can't believe it.

Nathanael Never trust anyone! Never hope! I can't believe I let my guard down this one time. And what happens? It blows up in my face, of course!

Cleophas I hope the others will be all right. Maybe we should have stayed...

Nathanael Are you crazy? And get killed, too?

Cleophas I know, I know. It's just that I worry about the others. And I feel like such a coward for deserting them.

Nathanael Hey! I'm no coward! If the guy had been for real, I would have fought to the death. But he wasn't, so the others are just a bunch of losers who were hoping they could be bigshots in the "kingdom." No way I'm dying with *them*.

{A stranger appears beside them, walking down the road.}

Stranger Greetings!

Cleophas *[startled by the stranger's sudden appearance]* Aiiii!

Nathanael *[belligerently]* Who are you? Where did you come from?

Stranger I'm just another traveler, like you.

Cleophas *[in confusion]* How did you do that? One moment we were alone on the road, and the next moment, you were right there!

Stranger I've been catching up to you for a while now. You just didn't notice me because you were so engrossed in your talk. What was it about?

Nathanael *[suspiciously]* Why do you want to know?

Stranger I always enjoy a good conversation. People don't talk enough these days about the most important things. I suppose it's these dark times.

Cleophas *[with feeling]* "Important" is an understatement! We were talking about our -

Nathanael *[interrupting him before he can reveal too much]* About the cult leader who just got killed.

Stranger Really? What cult leader?

Cleophas You didn't hear about it? How can you not have?

Stranger I've been away. Tell me about it.

Cleophas He was a wonderful man, wise and loving, and he had power, too! Power to heal, and to still the storm, and -

Nathanael *[interrupting]* Or so it's said. Of course, it all turned out to be a fake. Because he was arrested and killed and his power didn't help him escape at all.

Stranger Maybe he chose not to escape.

Nathanael Then he was a fool.

Stranger *[to Cleophas]* Do you concur?

Cleophas *[wistfully]* I honestly thought he was the Messiah. I was...I was one of his followers.

Nathanael Cleophas!

Cleophas *[sadly and steadily continuing to address the stranger]* So if you're the police, well, here I am. You can arrest me, too.

Stranger Don't worry! Your secret is safe with me. *[to Nathanael]* Were you one of his followers, too?

Nathanael All right: yes, I was. And you'd better keep that a secret, too!

Stranger I will, though I don't understand the great need. Why do you think the police would still be after you if they've already killed your leader?

Cleophas Strange things have happened since the rabbi's death. His body was stolen from its tomb, and then some of the women in the group claimed they met an angel who told them he was risen from the dead!

Stranger And what did you make of all this?

Nathanael Isn't it obvious? They're trying to stamp us out. Faking that he's still alive so we'll come out from hiding to look for him. And then: wham!

Stranger There's something I don't understand. You were both followers of this cult leader, and one of you still partly believes in him. So why did you stop just because he had been killed? And why didn't you consider that he might really be risen from the dead?

Cleophas I...I just assumed that...

Nathanael *[firmly]* If he had the power to come back from death, then he had the power to not be killed in the first place. He could have called down a legion of angels and wiped out the Romans with a snap of his fingers, instead of dying in just about the nastiest possible way a man can die!

Stranger Well, your theory sounds plausible, but I must be unfamiliar with the scriptures you're basing it on. Which ones were you thinking of?

Nathanael Scriptures?

Cleophas To tell you the truth, I'm not a big student of the scriptures.

Stranger May I explain them to you? May I show you what they say about the Messiah?

Cleophas Please!

Nathanael All right, but let's keep walking. I don't like standing around discussing the Messiah where a real Roman spy might overhear us.

Stranger Lead the way, then!

Scene 2

Andrew , James , Matthew , Phillip

{Meanwhile, back at the house where most of the disciples are in hiding.}

James Cowards! Deserters!

Andrew Said the man hiding out in the safehouse.

James Hey! I'm still here, aren't I? I didn't bolt like Cleophas or Nathanael. Or your brother!

Andrew Peter didn't bolt!

James Then where is he?

Andrew Maybe he got arrested! Did you ever think about that?

James If he did, it was after he ran. John told us everything we need to know: as soon as your brother saw the empty tomb, he bolted like he'd seen a ghost.

{An awkward pause, as Andrew has nothing to say in return.}

Phillip I still can't believe *my* brother left.

Matthew He was not...a good fit, anyway.

Phillip I know, I know. He was an idiot. He never stuck with anything in his life, so I shouldn't be surprised, but still...

Andrew You wanted to be able to look up to him.

Phillip Yeah. Like you do with Peter. Who I'm sure is okay.

Andrew Thanks.

Phillip Hey, maybe he was just thinking of our safety!

James What are you talking about?

Phillip If the missing body is some kind of trick to flush us out, then they'd be watching the tomb, wouldn't they? So if any of us went there, they could follow him back to the rest of us.

Matthew But no police have shown up on John's heels.

Phillip I know! Because Peter led them away in some other direction!

James *[grudgingly]* All right. That seems possible.

Andrew It's exactly the kind of thing he'd do. But now I'm worried. *Are* we safe here? Maybe we should think about getting out of town like Cleophas and Nathanael.

James And abandon the cause?

Phillip What cause? *He* was the cause. But now he's dead.

Matthew No he's not! Not as long as we stay faithful to his teachings. He changed my life, and I'm never going back to the way it was.

Andrew But that might give you a better chance of survival than any of us. If you went back to your old job, at least you'd be valuable to them, and maybe they'd take you back. I don't think they'll care two cents if any of *us* recants.

James Nobody's recanting! And nobody's running! We're going to stand together and we're going to stand fast! Do you understand me?

Phillip Okay, we get it. But I just have one question: why?

Scene 3

Cleophas , Nathanael , Stranger

{Cleophas, Nathanael, and the stranger arrive at an inn and sit down to eat.}

Nathanael *[privately to Cleophas]* Why did you invite him to join us? This was our chance to shake him.

Cleophas I want to hear more from him about the Messianic scriptures. I never thought about the Messiah like that before. *[in a more subdued voice]* It almost makes me think...it makes me think it might be possible, after all, that -

Nathanael *[interrupting impatiently]* Yes, yes, it's been very interesting, but have you thought how dangerous it is even to be talking about it? And how long is this guy going to follow us around? Is he planning to stay here tonight? Will he leave with us in the morning?

{The stranger enters.}

Stranger I want to thank you for inviting me to supper. I'm simply ravenous! But don't worry, I won't outstay my welcome. I need to be back in Jerusalem by evening.

Cleophas We're sorry we took you so far out of your way! You're going to have to turn right around and go back down the same road within the hour.

Stranger I'm not off my path at all. I needed to be *here* this afternoon.

Cleophas Well, we're glad you're joining us now.

Stranger The food smells wonderful!

Cleophas It's not much, just soup and bread, but Nathanael was one of our best cooks when...when our group was still together.

Stranger I can believe it. May I say the grace?

Cleophas Please.

Stranger Let us pray.

Scene 4

Andrew , Cleophas , James , Phillip

{That evening back in the safe house in Jerusalem, there's a loud knocking on the door.}

Phillip It's the Romans!

Andrew What do we do?

James We fight! Where are the swords?

Cleophas *[muffled, from outside the door]* Let me in! It's me!

Andrew Wait! I think it's Cleophas!

{He opens the door.}

James *[angrily]* You! What are you doing back here?

Cleophas *[excitedly]* It's the rabbi. He's alive again!

Phillip What?

Cleophas *[excitedly]* We met him on the road. We didn't even recognize him at first, but then later -

James *[interrupting]* Wait a minute. You didn't recognize him?

- Cleophas** I know it sounds unbelievable, but we just didn't. He walked and talked with us for three miles, too! He's...he's changed somehow. In appearance. *[resuming his fast paced blurting of the news]* Anyway -
- Andrew** *[interrupting]* Then how do you know it was even him?
- Cleophas** We recognized him later. When he broke the bread at supper. I know it seems crazy, but once we knew it was him, we could recognize him. He looked both like himself and unlike himself.
- James** That doesn't just *seem* crazy.
- Andrew** What did he say once you recognized him? Did he claim to be the rabbi?
- Cleophas** Actually, at the moment I recognized him, he...he disappeared. I'm not sure how. Nathanael and I were shouting for joy and jumping up and down, and he must have slipped out of the room without us noticing.
- James** *[sarcastically]* Perfect! You don't recognize him at all on the road, and then you think he's the rabbi because - I don't know, because he broke the bread the way the rabbi used to? - but conveniently, he doesn't stick around to confirm his hidden identity.
- Andrew** He probably got freaked out by your reaction and slipped out just as you suggested.
- Phillip** So Nathanael believed he was the rabbi, too? Why isn't he here?
- Cleophas** He did, even though he was pretty skeptical about the man when we first met him. I sent him to find the women while I came here.
- James** Oh, my God. What a mess!
- Cleophas** *[firmly]* It's not a mess! It's Glory! It's Victory when we thought all was lost. I'm sorry you won't believe me, but I've got to go. I've got to tell the others.
- {Cleophas exits.}*
- Phillip** What do we do now?
- James** *[incredulously]* It's all falling apart. Everybody's cracking up.
- Phillip** Who do you think they met, though?

Andrew I don't know. Maybe they were hallucinating. That would explain the man disappearing. Or maybe it was a Roman spy.

James And now Cleophas is out there telling everybody it's okay to come out of hiding!

Andrew *[with sudden urgency]* If the man on the road was a Roman spy, and if he continued tailing Cleophas after he did his disappearing act...

Phillip Then Cleophas just led him straight to us!

James *[coming to a sudden decision and speaking quickly]* All right, that's it! You're right, Andrew, we've got to get out of here. Pack what you can, and be quick about it!

{There's a loud knocking on the door.}

Phillip *[fearfully]* What's that!

James *[in a panic]* It's the Romans! They've found us!

Andrew What do we do?

Scene 5

Jesus , Peter

{Peter roams the streets of Jerusalem.}

Peter *[angrily]* Where are you! Come out and face me! Coward! I know you can hear me! Hell! You can hear everything now!

{Jesus appears.}

Jesus *[calmly]* So there's no need to yell, right?

Peter *[accusingly]* You!

Jesus You don't seem surprised to see me. Or happy. You do know who I am, don't you?

Peter *[resentfully]* You think I don't remember the mountain?

Jesus Ah yes. You've seen me in this form before. And I suppose you remember what I said that day.

Peter *[angrily]* That you would rise from the dead.

Jesus So: You remember that day and my words on that day when others forgot them, and you believed I had risen as soon as you saw the empty tomb, and you alone have recognized me without hesitation in my new state. No one else has done as well as you, not even John. Yet, I feel you'd like to punch me in the face. Why?

Peter *[exploding with rage]* Because you set me up! You knew you weren't really dying, but you goaded me into swearing my faith to you, and then you let me follow you into that courthouse where you knew I would...I would...

Jesus Where I knew you would what?

Peter *[in a climax of shame]* Betray you! Betray you! I betrayed you and you knew it would happen and you knew you weren't even going to die! You let me betray you for *nothing!*

{A long pause, during which - if the person playing the part is up to it - Peter sobs inconsolably.}

Jesus *[gently]* Peter, Peter. Bravest and boldest of my disciples. Rock upon which I will build my Church. Just because I'm back doesn't mean I didn't die. Just because I knew it would happen doesn't mean it wasn't bitter. All that death is, I felt.

Peter *[after a long pause, like a sleepy child in the aftermath of his passion]* All that death is?

Jesus To the dregs.

Peter What...what did it feel like?

Jesus Like I had been set up. Like God had tricked me into surrendering my will to His, and then abandoned me to a cruel joke of a fate. Like he left me to fend for myself in a world where it didn't even matter any more.

Peter *[grimly, but beginning to regain a little of his rough and tumble humor]* Sounds familiar.

Jesus No one will be able to enter the Kingdom without first passing through that door. Like you and I have.

Peter And how do you feel now?

Jesus *[after a dramatic pause: triumphantly, like a roaring lion]* Risen!

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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