



Sermon by: Rev. Teresa A. Larson
Text: Luke 24:13-35

May 4, 2025

On the Road with God

I recently stumbled upon the work of Sister Corita Kent, the “Pop Art Nun” of the 1960s. Sister Kent was an artist, educator, and advocate for social justice whose ministry most famously intersected in her Andy Warhol-inspired artwork. (For reference, think about those Campbell Soup cans on the first-floor gallery in the Milwaukee Art Museum.) Sister Kent’s vibrant serigraphs gained popularity through the 1960s amid a rather unsteady cultural climate. Her work reflected her concerns about poverty, racism, and war, urging viewers to consider and live into the societal need for Christ’s peace and justice. “Art does not come from thinking,” she wrote, “but from responding.”¹

In 1968, Sister Kent received a commission to make a poster for the Poor People’s March on Washington, DC. Her poster is half red, half blue, with the colors meeting in a straight line down the middle. The text, printed in bold white letters, reads: “God’s not dead, he’s bread.” In her comments on the poster Sister Kent wrote that “the Incarnation is still going on, is still bursting like firecrackers and sending out great shocks of light into all things around us. We just have to pay attention and participate in the places where it’s happening.”²

“Pay attention” and “participate” go hand-in-hand. In the movements and moments of our lives that really matter, observation isn’t enough; participation is what we crave. That intersection of paying attention and participation is where we meet the two disciples on the Emmaus Road. They had certainly been paying attention over the last few days, having watched their teacher be crucified.

“We had hoped...” they told the stranger who joined them on the road, perhaps the saddest words in the New Testament. Their disappointment is understandable. Their hopefulness and expectation that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah had grown as they had traveled with him, and then disaster struck when he was executed as a common criminal. They are now walking along a path of disillusionment, away from the place that represented their hope and the promises that turned out empty; a necessary pilgrimage from that which had died and been placed in a tomb.

And yet, we meet these disciples walking away from Jerusalem and on a collision with the Risen One. In the practice of moving *away* from hope, they find themselves in the midst of living hope, even if they couldn’t recognize it. There are lots of explanations across scholarship about how and why this is. Surly they would at least have recognized Jesus as he was doing an exegetical walk through the sacred scriptures and stories that said that it had to be this way; that suffering was necessary for the Messiah to enter into glory.

Hearing the stories had made their hearts burn, but it was in doing the things that their teacher had taught them that they were able to recognize him: to go together, to invite others in, to share a meal. It was their actions, their participation, that made all the difference. He's not dead, he's made known in the breaking of bread.

What I find most compelling about Sister Kent's phrase is that the breaking of bread is just one of the ways that we come to know, and participate with, an otherwise invisible Risen Christ. As Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome, seeing isn't necessarily believing; who hopes for what they have not seen? The hope of Christ comes when we don't just observe, but participate; living out our discipleship as faithfully as we can and honoring the depth of our human experience – especially when we, like the disciples, find ourselves in a state of hopelessness and walking away from what we had known, what we had loved, what we trusted, that is no longer available to us.

In his reflection on this story, artist Scott Ericson writes that “sometimes the story God is telling us about our lives is not the story we are telling ourselves; sometimes the story of walking away, the story of despair and disillusionment, becomes a story of resurrection. The two on the road were having a candid conversation about vulnerable sorrow, and in the midst of that, Jesus shows up with a simple question of curiosity that ends up changing the whole trajectory of their lives and ours as well. God is especially present when people get vulnerable[,]”³ and with the vulnerable. God shows up when we do, together, those vulnerable practices that he taught us: to love our neighbors, to tend to the sick, to feed the hungry, to invite others in, to accept the invitations extended to us, to break bread and share a meal. “Our story of disillusionment then becomes a story of resurrection, a renewed pilgrimage back to what our hope was – and who our hopes was in – all along.”

To quote Ericson again, “I really wish there's something that I could say that could completely convince you of the Risen One's presence in your life, but I can't.”⁴ And neither, I would add, can anyone else. We have to live and experience the stories of our lives, of our faith, for ourselves – though certainly not by ourselves – to come to know the presence of God in and around us. Nobody can do it for us, or for you. We can, however, hold faith for one another. Care for one another. Learn and serve and grow together; to tell story after story and let our hearts burn for that which we know in our bones in true.

Knowing, though, that even when we become aware of Christ's obvious presence, it may not stick around. Right when we want to freeze time, hold space, build a shrine, canonize the place, form a line, charge a ticket...something happens, and he disappears. This is a common pattern of our lives of faith. Our hearts are open just enough to see the larger promise of resurrection alive in our lives and in the world, but short enough that we don't get too comfortable. I think that the greatest gift of our lives fully lived through the lens of resurrection promises is that we never fully arrive, understand, or comprehend the presence of Christ. We have to keep searching. Keep showing up. Keep telling stories. And when we do, the more deeply we will come to know the depth and magnitude of the story

of a God who loves us. Who loves you. Whose love for creation is so great that God came to be with us in the person of Jesus Christ, who by his death and rising conquered the powers of death and darkness so that we can be assured that we are not alone. That we are never too far from grace. That our story of walking away will transform into a story of resurrection. And that we are loved, claimed beloved, that God is with us, and has equipped us with a story to tell that will make our hearts burn, good news of great joy that is for all people: he's not dead, he's bread. Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Amen.

¹ *Finding Solace in the Work of the Pop Art Nun*, Sojourners, August 2021. <https://sojo.net/interactive/culture/finding-solace-work-pop-art-nun#>; <https://www.corita.org/>

² Ibid.

³ *Station 5: The Risen One Recognized in the Breaking of Bread*, Scott Ericson, <https://www.scottericksonart.com/station-5>

⁴ Ericson, Scott. *Say Yes: Finding Resurrection Beyond the Death of a Dream*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2022, p. 132.