

community. As we discover ways to open to Jesus' transforming presence on the road between the now and the not yet, it becomes a transforming community. A transforming community is the body of Christ alive on earth through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Each word we might use to describe the kind of community we are talking about is useful in highlighting a different nuance. "Christian" highlights the person of Christ and what it might mean to live 'Christ-like.' "Transforming" emphasizes our commitment to being transformed in Christ's presence through concrete practices for opening to him. "Spiritual" highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in meditating Christ's presence in all the ways he promised.

During this new sermon series and during our faith journey together at Faith Church we will strive for 'Christian community,' 'Transforming community,' and 'Spiritual community.' We journey together on the road between the now and the not yet. Let us lean in to the conversations that can take place when we choose to walk together on the Emmaus Road. In the midst of our conversations and sharing our stories, Jesus draws near us and among us and we, too, find ourselves changed in his presence. Amen.

Reflection:

1. Read Luke 24:13-35 out loud.
2. Where do you experience yourself to be on the road between the now and not yet?
3. What is your inclination when you find yourself on your own Emmaus Road – to seek out spiritual companions who can walk the road with you or to take the journey alone?
4. How do you respond to the idea of walking the road between the now and the not yet with others?

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LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST (1)
Choosing to Walk Together
Luke 24:13-14
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

What do you think of when you think of community? What comes to your mind when you hear or see the word, 'community'? We may think of a geographical understanding, such as the community of the Downers Grove area, or the community of DuPage County, or the community of Chicagoland. We may also think of the faith community at Faith Church or other churches as the community where we worship God in the sanctuary, where we have potluck lunches in the fellowship hall after church, where we participate in Bible studies in the church library or at a member's house, or where we care for one another in times of crisis. We may think of an accountability group where people confess their struggles with sin and check in with one another regularly about how it's going.

But when you think of community you may be flooded with painful memories – a church split you got caught up in, a small group that fell apart because of a disagreement or an unresolved conflict, or a denomination that couldn't resolve theological differences. If you have been shaped by these negative experiences in your community, you may have settled into a state of cynicism on community. As I described various aspects of community life, both positive and negative aspects, none of them capture what community really is.

One of the main reasons we are confused about community is that we make it primarily about us – our experiences and feelings, our life situations, what we want or need, or some vision of what we're going to accomplish together. We labor under the mistaken idea that we can create a community by casting a compelling vision, by developing the right curriculum or plan, by training and supporting small group leaders, and creating a "safe" environment. Then we

are disappointed when things fall apart. When we face our limitations and failures to build an ideal Christian community, living up to one another's needs and expectations, we need to accept the fact that a Christian community is not about us at all. It is about the transforming presence of Christ – all he will do in and through and for each of us.

Today's text is the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They had a dream of a community living together with Christ, but their "wish dream" had vanished. They were traveling along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It was Sunday, the third day of the most traumatic weekend of their lives. On Friday these disciples along with many others had witnessed the painful, humiliating and violent death of their beloved leader, teacher, and friend. That night and through the day on Saturday they sat with each other in despair. And now, on this day, a glimmer of hope had been introduced to them.

Some of the women in their group had visited the tomb in which their leader had been buried. They found it empty and met the risen Christ. They came back from the tomb and told these things to others. There was talk of resurrection, but it was too soon to tell whether it was a miracle or just an illusion. They had hung around in waiting mode as long as they could, and now it was time to get back to real life. Their dream of what the kingdom of God would look like, the hopes and dreams on which they had oriented the last three years, and the commitment to follow Jesus – it was all gone. They had to figure out how to live from now.

Not knowing what else to do, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple were wandering home, trying to make sense of it all. They were suspended somewhere between loss and possible gain, between grief and possible joy, between human suffering and redemption, and between dashed hopes and daring to hope again. They were burnt out emotionally, spiritually and physically. The road from

Jerusalem to Emmaus was the road between the now and the not yet.

Likewise, all of us are on our own Emmaus Road, somewhere between the now and the not yet – in some area of our lives. We face the disrupting and traumatic events from time to time on our faith journey – the loss of a job, the breakup of a marriage or some other close relationship, the death of a loved one. These events have taken something from us and the new has not yet come. We might encounter a crucial moment to let go of one thing in order to be open to something new. In the midst of these situations we are waiting for something that has not yet been fully revealed. Even though our Emmaus Road experience is beyond our control, we do have control over one thing: whether we will walk the road alone or choose to walk it with others.

The disciples' choice to walk together and talk about all the things that had happened to them was fairly radical. What they had been through was so personal, so traumatic and so confounding. They might not want to talk about it until they had gotten a handle on it. Or they could have chosen to walk together but avoid talking about what was really going on, chattering away about anything else but that. But they chose to walk together and talk with each other about "*all these things that had happened.*" (Luke 24:14)

The disciples on the Emmaus Road weren't praying in any form, or having a Bible study, or having a formal quiet time. They were discussing the stuff of their lives – all things that had happened that were having such an impact on them spiritually and in every other way. Their conversation opened up space for Jesus to draw near. And their encounter with Jesus was completely reorienting and life changing.

That is the essence of the Christian community. Before Jesus draws near, a group of people journeying together is merely a human community. Once Jesus joins us on the road, it becomes a Christian