

# What the Stranger Gave Them

Hespeler, April 19, 2026 © Scott McAndless – Third Sunday of Easter  
Acts 2:14a, 36-41, Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19, 1 Peter 1:17-23, Luke 24:13-35

**T**wo followers of Jesus are walking down the road discussing the things that they know about him. Everything that they say about him is true; nothing is inaccurate. They know that Jesus was a prophet and mighty in word and deed. They know about his arrest, condemnation and crucifixion.

And they also know about the women who went to his tomb. They are familiar with their reports of seeing angels and not finding his body. And they are aware that the claims of these women have been confirmed by further investigation. And yet, ironically and jarringly, though they know these essential elements of the story that we celebrate every Easter, they find no joy in any of their discussions. They are depressed and walk with sad and downcast eyes.

## The Truth

How can this be? They know the truth, and the truth is what matters, isn't it? All we have to do to change people's hearts and minds is to show them what is true. But these people know the truth. They know all about it, and it does not seem to be helping them at all. If anything, it seems to only make them feel worse.

A stranger joins them as they walk. He asks of them and receives from them all of the data they have about this man Jesus. He doesn't give them any new information. And yet, somehow, he seems to change everything for them.

## Two-Hour Conversation

And I realize, of course, that some of you are jumping ahead to the end of the story and want to say that this stranger does give them some new information. It turns out at the end that the stranger is himself the risen Lord Jesus. That is a bombshell in terms of new information. But they only realize it after he disappears.

But before that, they are on a seven-mile hike together. That would have made for about a two-hour conversation if they were walking at a reasonable pace. And in all that time, there is no indication that the stranger gives them any new information or evidence.

In fact, he kind of plays dumb. He acts as if he has never even heard of this Jesus of, where did you say he came from again? Nazareth? He's never even heard of him before.

## How He Moved Them

He somehow takes only their information and is able to spin it back to them so that, even while they are walking and before his secret identity is revealed, their hearts begin to burn within them. With no new information, he can move their hearts from sorrow to joy and from darkness to light.



And that is the effect that I want to focus on today. There are so many in our world who are walking through this life feeling sad and sorrowful. Their sadness is not without reason because they are not lacking in information.

## Streams of Information

We are all being fed information all day, every day. Most of us have these little devices in our hands or in our pockets all the time that will, if we let them, be only too happy to feed us a constant stream of information. If we are careful and check where that information is coming from, it might even be accurate information.

We are, in fact, living in the golden age of information – an age when the most accurate truths can be transmitted to a greater number of people more efficiently than ever before.

And what is the result of that? Are more people better informed than ever before? Is the world more united and all on the same page than has ever been possible since the creation of the world?

No, not really. On the contrary, we seem to be more divided than ever before. We also seem to have a harder time agreeing about anything.

## More Information Doesn't Help

So it is clear that more information alone does not lead to more agreement. And, when people already have different opinions, it seems that coming along and giving them more information doesn't bring people together. It tends to lead them further apart.

To take a simple example, say that you meet someone who believes that the earth is flat, and you say that it is round. If you proceed to offer them evidence – pictures taken from space, experiments that calculate the curvature of the earth, the flight paths of airplanes – what will be their response?

Will the flat-earther simply crumble in the face of your onslaught of truth? Not likely. If you have ever tried to do that, you will have discovered that the more you confront them with conflicting information and hard evidence, the more likely they will be to double down. They will call your facts conspiracy theories. They will reject your sources as corrupt and self-serving.

So, going around and giving people more information is not going to make any of this better and will likely make it worse. So, what do we do? Well, that brings us back to this genius stranger on the road to Emmaus. If he doesn't bring more information, what does he offer his walking companions to revolutionize their point of view?

## What He Told Them

Well, this is what we're told he did. **“Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!”** he said. **“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”**

But he didn't just tell them this. He actually showed it to them. **“Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”** What he is doing here isn't telling them anything that they don't already know. What he is doing is taking the information that they have given him and repackaging it within the larger narrative of Scripture.

## Interpreting Their Information

He is saying to them, “Yes, it is discouraging that this Jesus was **‘handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified.’** But look at all the stories in the Bible where God has been able to use suffering and death to bring about hope and salvation for his people.

“And yes, this Jesus may not have redeemed Israel in the way that you had expected, by setting it free from the yoke of Rome, but think of all the times when Israel was under the yoke of Egypt or Babylon or Persia, and God was able to save his people in ways that surprised the whole world! What if God is doing the same thing through what looks like a humiliating defeat of this Jesus of yours?

“And yes, I know you think that these women have lost their minds with their talk of empty tombs and visions of angels, but how many heroes of the scripture have spoken such nonsense before. How many of them turned out to be speaking the word of the Lord when it was needed most?”

## Providing a Narrative

He is not giving them more information; what he is doing is giving them a radically different perspective on the information that they already have. He is telling them a story about the information. And that is what makes all the difference.

And that is what the world needs today more than anything else, I believe. We don’t necessarily need more information because we have demonstrated rather clearly that we don’t know what to do with information.

We are living in a time where people will fight and disagree over all kinds of information, including facts that were considered settled just a few years ago. We are living in an age where people hesitate to trust the established experts in any field because they are experts. We are living in an age where it is quite common for people to spend a few hours watching videos on the internet and decide, based only on that, that they know more about a given topic than people do who have advanced degrees and expertise.

## Using Stories to Bring Us Together

Information isn’t getting us anywhere these days, at least not anywhere where we can all go together. But that doesn’t mean that there is nothing we can do. People have rarely unified over information. What really brings people together is stories.

That is how people make sense of the world – how they have always made sense of the world. People tell stories. They take various facts and information and weave them together into a story that speaks to us much more powerfully than any individual pieces of information ever could.

That is what the stranger offered the travelling disciples on that road to Emmaus. He offered them a story. He took their information about what Jesus had promised, about his rejection and crucifixion and about the strange things that had been observed at the tomb, and he told them a different story about those things. He told them a story about a different kind of messiah than the one that they might have been expecting. And that different story was what made their hearts burn within them.

## What We're Talking About as We Walk

The facts of the world that surround us seem discouraging today. The world has become entangled in a war in Iran from which there is no easy way out. What's more, the impacts of that war are having devastating effects on a global scale.

On the domestic front, we are dealing with mounting crises: a lack of affordable housing, inflation, an ongoing addiction and mental-health crisis.

These are the kinds of things that people are walking down the road and talking about. And all of these things are disturbing and upsetting people.

## The Role of the Church

What then, is the role of the church when this is what people are talking about? We are called to be the stranger who comes alongside people as they walk in that state of anxiety and confusion.

And I know it might be tempting to come alongside people to offer them new information. That is the tendency of our world. We are tempted to say, "Oh look, here are the economic indicators that suggest that things are going to get better." Or we might say, "This politician or that politician is promising to create this policy that will break us out of this problem."

Is that going to change people's mood? I doubt it. That is the kind of information that they have heard a hundred times before and it has only led to more disappointment. No, what they need is a new story that brings new meaning to the facts that they already know. And that is exactly what the Christian faith can offer.

## The Stories We Can Offer

We can tell them the story of the incarnation. It is the story of a God who did not avoid the suffering and struggles of this world but actually chose to enter into them. In Christ, God became human so that God might know what it is to live with our fears and our struggles. It is a story that reveals a God of infinite compassion and care.

We can tell them the story of Christ crucified. It is the story of the worst defeat and humiliation possible. But it is also the story of how God used that defeat to turn the way of this world upside-down. God defeated the power of death and despair upon the very wood of Jesus' cross. God used the weakness of Christ to defeat the powers of this world.

And we can tell the story of an empty tomb – a story not of confusion or of despair as the women thought at first, but a story of life taking the victory in the face of death.

These are the stories that we can tell. And they are stories that can fire people's imaginations and make their hearts burn within them. These are the stories we can tell because of Easter.

So, the next time you run into people who are arguing or fighting because they disagree about information, or who are filled with sorrow because of what they see in the world, how about you don't try to give them any new information. Tell them a story – tell them *the* story. It is the most powerful thing you can do.