

**“Recognize Anyone?”**  
**A Sermon Delivered by Rev. John Balicki**  
**Third Sunday of Easter**  
**April 19, 2026**  
**St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine**

*“Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”*

Oh my, what a shame. Yet these two, Cleopas and his wife, weren’t the only disciples who failed to recognize the risen Jesus when he appeared to them out of nowhere. Both the male and female disciples failed to recognize, to immediately understand who was with them. It was towards evening, was the sun in their eyes?

Cynthia Bourgeault in “the Wisdom Jesus” offers a deeper reason:

*What keeps these two good souls from recognizing their master is very clear: it’s their self-pity and nostalgia. “Clearly they are stuck in their story, and their stuckness is what makes them unable to see the person standing right before their faces. They are trapped in the past, filled with self-pity and doubt, and no one can recognize anything in this state.*

Margaret Silf wonders whether Jesus’ own mother, Mary, would have recognized him right away? There is no record of such an encounter in the Scriptures. So we can speculate. Now I know we have lots of mothers out there, we do most Sundays, but today we have Natalie, mother of Eleanor, and Katie, mother of Knox, and we have their grandmothers and great-grandmothers and all of you think the idea is preposterous that you wouldn’t recognize your own child. And so it is!

But today as we celebrate the sacrament of Baptism for these two young children, it is all about how will they, and we, more clearly recognize the risen Lord in our lives. How did it happen for the two disciples in gospel? The scriptures say that it was a distance of about seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a healthy walk but nothing uncommon in that day. And a long enough walk to have a good conversation, and it was in the length of that walk that Jesus rewrites their story for them, taking them through the appropriate Old Testament pointers and explaining their meaning in the light of his own life and death, he breaks bread with them in communion and then disappears. Finally they “get it.” Bourgeault concludes: *“They have come to understand that their attuned hearts are the instruments of recognition and that these same attuned hearts will bind them to their risen Lord moment by moment and forever.”*

In his book "Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary", Marcus Borg writes, "*The risen Jesus journeys with his followers, even when they don't know it. This story is a metaphor of early Christian experience into one afternoon. Whether the story happened or not, Emmaus always happens. Emmaus happens again and again...*" Just as Jesus used parables to teach important truths, Luke uses this parable to keep us alert to the Divine strangers along the road. May we, in all areas of our life, be open to Emmaus moments, when unexpected strangers join us on the journey, when glimpses of the Divine leave our hearts on fire and truly capture us.

What a perfect gospel for the baptism of Eleanor and Knox. Because isn't this our hope for them if we are truly honest. Yes we wish them a long-life, and happiness and health and security but can we go deeper than that. Can we wish that they might have glimpses of the Divine that leave their hearts on fire and with fire in their hearts bring understanding, compassion and healing to a world that desperately needs it?

And how will they do that when they can't do much of anything for themselves right now? They need us, us who are parents and us who are family and us who are church community because none of this is easy. If Emmaus is a metaphor for the journey of Knox and Eleanor through life then we are the ones who are going to have to help them recognize Jesus and if we are going to help them, we have to recognize Jesus for ourselves, each and every one of us.

How can we possibly do that? As the baptismal rite says, "I will with the help of God". We will make a bunch of promises, all with God's help to achieve them, and let's focus on two.

***Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?***

How will they and we on our Emmaus walk recognize Jesus with us? By recognizing the Jesus in one another, in everyone. That's so hard because they may run into kids at school who make fun of them or even bully them; as they grow they'll find people who think very differently about life, success or politics. Many of these baptismal promises might sound simple but are hard to live out if we take them seriously. I mean "respecting the dignity of every human being"? Think how different our world would be if we all did that.

And how do we do those hard things? Well there is one other promise:

***Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?***

It was in the breaking of the bread that the two disciples finally realized it was the risen Jesus and we continue on that tradition as we break the bread of Christ every Sunday. Sara Miles describes this power in her book, "Take This Bread",

*One early, cloudy morning when I was 46, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. A routine Sunday activity for tens of millions of Americans – except that up until that moment I'd led a thoroughly secular life, at best indifferent to religion, more often appalled by its fundamentalist crusades. This was my first communion. It changed everything. Eating Jesus, as I did that day to my great astonishment, led me against all my expectations to a faith I'd scorned and work I'd never imagined. The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all but actual food – indeed, the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of a body, I realized that what I'd been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people.*

I pray that Knox and Eleanor won't wait 46 years to have a moment like this; I pray that the rest of us won't either. But I pray that we all on our Emmaus journey will at least once, hopefully more than once, have a glimpse of the divine that leaves our hearts on fire and truly captures us.