



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London

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Diocese of Chelmsford

## **Opened Eyes and Burning Hearts**

Sunday 19 April 2026

Luke 24: 13-35

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The Road to Emmaus is one of the most beautiful and deeply human stories in the Gospel of Luke. It's a story that holds together so many emotions at once: sorrow, confusion, disappointment, but also recognition, hope, and joy. And perhaps that's why it resonates so strongly with us, because it reflects something of our own journey of faith. At its heart, this is a story about ordinary people bringing their fears, their doubts, and their questions; and discovering that those very fears, doubts, and questions are met by the risen Christ.

The story begins by describing how two disciples are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the very day the tomb was found empty. It's about seven miles, a long walk, especially when you are enveloped in grief, and your heart is heavy with confusion. And I am sure this is exactly how the disciples felt. Everything they had hoped for seems to have fallen apart. Jesus, the one they believed would redeem Israel, had been crucified. The one they trusted, followed, and loved was gone. Yes, they've heard the reports from the women that the tomb is empty. But far from bringing clarity, it only deepened their confusion. They are not celebrating with this news; they are bewildered. So they walk, and they talk, and they try to make sense of it all. And as they do, Jesus comes alongside them, but they don't recognise Him. And that detail matters, because it reminds us that sometimes, even when Christ is near, we do not always see Him clearly. Grief, disappointment, and unmet expectations can cloud our vision.

As they walk, Jesus asks them a simple question: *"What are you discussing with each other?"* And in that question, there is such gentleness. He already knows the answer, but He invites them to speak. He gives them space to express what is really in their hearts. And they do. They tell Him everything: about Jesus' life and power, about His crucifixion, about their dashed hopes. *"We had hoped..."* Those three words carry so much weight. They had hoped He would redeem Israel. They had hoped things would be different. They had hoped God would act in a certain way. And perhaps we all know something of that feeling too. We may have hoped for healing. We may have hoped for clarity. We may have hoped for a different outcome. Faith does not protect us from disappointment, but it does give us somewhere to take it. And how does Jesus respond? The disciples are not rebuked for their sadness; Jesus meets them in it, He walks with them in it, and challenges their understanding. *"How foolish you are, and how slow to believe..."* Jesus responded in this way not because they lacked information, but because they had misunderstood the story. They had read the Scriptures, but they didn't understand their true meaning. They had focused on the glory of the Messiah, but not the suffering. They expected victory, but not the

cross. And so Jesus patiently begins to reframe everything. Starting with Moses and all the Prophets, He shows them how the whole of Scripture points to Him, how the suffering of the Messiah was not a detour, but the very means of redemption. The cross was not a tragic interruption; it was always the plan. And this is so important for us today, because we, too, can read Scripture through our own expectations. We can shape God's story into something we find more comfortable, less costly, less surprising. But when we read the Bible through a Jesus lens, through His life, death, and resurrection, we begin to see its true meaning. We begin to see that God's way of working is often not what we expect, but it is always faithful.

As they walk, something begins to change within them. They don't yet recognise Jesus, but His words are doing something. Later, they will describe it as their hearts *burning within them*. There is a quiet transformation happening, before the moment of recognition. Eventually, they reach Emmaus. Jesus appears to continue on, but they urge Him strongly: "*Stay with us*", and He does. They sit down at the table, and then, in a simple, familiar act, everything changes. He takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to them, and suddenly their eyes are opened. They recognise Him. It is in this moment, this ordinary, yet deeply sacred act, that they finally see. And that is no accident, because this action echoes the Last Supper. It echoes the life of the Church. It echoes every moment where Christ is made known in the breaking of bread. And then, just as suddenly, He is gone, but now they understand. Now they see that He was with them all along, and they say to one another: "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*"

In Jesus' death and resurrection, the power of sin is broken, death is defeated, and a new reality has begun. Jesus is not simply brought back to life like Lazarus, who will once again have to face death. Jesus is truly risen, transformed, and lives forever, through His Holy Spirit, among us, with us, and within us. And that changes everything. And so, this story is not just about two disciples on a road long ago. It is about you and me. It reminds us that Christ walks with us, even when we do not recognise Him. It invites us to bring our confusion and disappointment honestly before Him. It calls us to return to Scripture with open hearts and minds. And it points us again and again to that place of recognition, the breaking of the bread, because it is there, time and time again, that Christ makes Himself known. And when He does, something happens. Our understanding deepens, our hope is renewed, our eyes are opened, and our hearts begin to burn within us. Amen.