

PASTOR ELLEN: I did my Clinical Pastoral Education at Maine Medical Center in Portland, Maine. And, I vividly remember one of my patients, a dear, elderly Episcopalian man who was dying. This man deeply touched my heart. I will never forget the day I read him today's story from Luke's gospel. After I finished reading, he said to me, "There's always an Emmaus." The next day, my friend died, but I shall always remember what he said in response to that story.

There is always an Emmaus. Biblical archeologists tell us that the exact location of the village of Emmaus is unknown. There are at least nine possible locations that are candidates for the small biblical town, but historians tell us there is no record of any village called Emmaus in any other ancient source. We simply do not know where Emmaus might have been. Tradition tells us that it might have been a place just a few hours walk from Jerusalem. However, New Testament scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, suggest that Emmaus is nowhere. Emmaus is *nowhere* precisely because Emmaus is **everywhere**. Every one of us has at one time, or indeed for some of us, many times, traveled along the road to Emmaus. Many of us travel that road as Cleopas and his friend did, trying to understand what has happened or is happening, trying to

understand as our hearts burn within us. We travel the road while experiencing confusion, bewilderment, brokenness, pain, grief, and great challenge. And we often think we are alone, only to find out later that the risen Christ has been walking along with us the whole time. As the community of Christ gathers around those who are hurting and asking questions, the hurting are comforted by the presence of the risen Lord Jesus and they find **hope**. Yes, there is always an Emmaus.

READER # 2: *Yes, there is always an Emmaus.* Today, the entire global community is traveling the road to Emmaus as we face the brokenness and pain that is taking place because of climate change. The entire creation is groaning in pain, and we carry a hunger that burns within us as we want to better understand and face this growing reality. Yesterday we celebrated Earth Day. Today we continue to celebrate this planet on which we live, and we celebrate the risen universal Christ's presence to us in all of creation. For the past 53 years the world has set aside April 22nd to think about the gift we have been given in this home we call mother earth. Earth Day almost always falls during our liturgical season of Easter. So, it is fitting that, as we celebrate the resurrected Jesus, we celebrate Earth Day. Throughout the Easter season we are reminded that we celebrate the one

who was born so that we can know God's presence in our world and in our flesh. We celebrate the one who was born so that we can know this God who suffered and continues to suffer the burdens and sorrows and pains of our world, even the pains of this suffering creation. Easter is about new life and the risen Christ bringing forth new life. And that is not simply some kind of disembodied life that only awaits us in some future consummation. It is the first fruits, the seed that rises as a green blade to bear fruit. In the northern hemisphere where we live, Easter arrives with the signs and symbols of spring, the flowers, and the songs of returning birds. As we pay attention to these signs and symbols, this focus can become one of the ways in which we discover the risen Christ among us. We discover we are deeply and inextricably connected to creation and re-creation, to our Creator and this Earth.

READER # 3: *Yes, there is always an Emmaus.* Learning the truth about this earth means facing reality and facing facts and truth so that we can then work for change. The ELCA has had a focus on caring for creation since our denomination was formed. And, as we mark 53 years of this Earth Day celebration, we also look ahead. We look to the seven short

remaining years before it will be too late to stop a 2° Celsius temperature rise for our planet. Just think about a few of these facts:

- 19 of the 20 hottest years ever have occurred since 2001.
- Extreme weather is becoming more frequent and severe.
- Food and water supplies are at risk.
- Oceans are at risk.
- Human health is at risk.

In a time of climate crisis, disasters of Biblical scale are impacting our communities and the places we love. Today, just like in the Bible, floods and famines show us a deep truth about human life: that our lives are intimately dependent on the land. In our sacred scriptures, we read the stories of creatures made from the soil, whose lives are sustained—physically and spiritually—by the fruits of the land. In these stories, we see how, in the midst of disaster, the land can be fertile ground to sustain ourselves. We also learn that we must take prophetic action and work for justice. We know that a commitment to address climate change needs to happen **now**. We know that it takes all people across the globe, people of all religions and backgrounds, to work together to adapt, to mitigate what is coming, and provide the necessary change that is urgent. Over 97% of climate scientists in this world have been warning us and telling us what we need to do now. And, in fact, some of them are members of this Faith community. They are prophets in our time. If we truly care for our neighbor,

we need to listen to the deep truth of their message and respond appropriately. For people of faith, this response is something that is rooted in our faith, and it is all about living out our love for our neighbors.

READER # 4: *Yes, there is always an Emmaus.* As we journey through these critical years, we need to face the reality of climate change and what lies before us. We need to understand that the disruptions we now face, the extreme weather events that are becoming part of our experience, are only a foretaste of the disruption we will likely face if the world does not address the issue of climate change. Most scientists agree that addressing climate change **is THE** most important task for humanity. But there is hope! As Christians, we name “love” as an act of ultimate importance. The love we proclaim and live is a love that **includes** addressing climate change and caring for this planet! The impending impacts are so catastrophic, and our window of time is getting short. As people created by God and placed in relationship with all of creation, all the threatened creatures, from the most vulnerable human populations to species endangered by extinction and ecosystems moving toward collapse, there is so much at stake. Rooted in scripture, and our understanding of the risen Christ, we can draw on all that Jesus did and taught in the context of our beautiful, life-giving, and

threatened world. Resurrection takes place in bodies and is encountered in and through bodies. And the encounters are **not** limited to human bodies but to other forms of life and matter around us. Our Emmaus journey can help us see more clearly that we are **enmeshed** in the communion of the planet and cosmos. We can allow our hearts to burn within us as we, too, walk with the Risen One and have our eyes opened to our deep connectedness to this earth. We can have our eyes opened to recognize and discern, through words and conversations with scientists, by **actions** of gratitude, **and** even in the simple but sacred ritual of breaking and sharing bread.

READER # 5: *Yes, there is always an Emmaus.* At the heart of the Emmaus story is an urging towards a deeper faith: to **recognize and discern**, not just to see. Like Cleopas and his companion, we need to open our eyes to what is before us. As ecological readers of today's gospel, this means being attentive to the material, to matter itself as we look at this world. It means to be eyewitnesses to everything we see around us, and to grow and mature in our understanding so that we recognize the relationships that form our Earth community. As we learn and grow and work for change, we **are** on the road to Emmaus. And as Pastor John

Schleicher says, “May we, like Cleopas and the other disciple, recognize our risen Lord even now when we invite one another, friend or stranger, to stay with us awhile, have supper with us, and find in our time together unexpected hope and promise of a whole world rising from death.” Yes, *there is always an Emmaus.*