



New Way of Seeing

In her interpretation of the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35

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suggests we open our eyes to see resurrection in the world around us.

The Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35) is one of the post-resurrection “appearance stories” – where Jesus “appears” in a bodily form albeit a resurrected bodily form. Materiality fills these narratives: details of time and place, eyewitness accounts. This Gospel speaks of resurrection as an enhanced experience of body and body in place, not as an escape from the body.

The beginning of the story immediately grounds the people in the material of the road, the distance and in the immediacy of “all that has just happened”. Two of Jesus’s disciples are walking together on the road from Jerusalem

to the nearby village of Emmaus. The evangelist does not name the two disciples at first and so they could be “any disciple”, male or female. We can all enter this story in the corporeality of our own bodily experience in place.

Then another traveller joins the two disciples on their Emmaus journey and he asks what they are discussing. The narrator tells the reader that this fellow traveller is Jesus but the disciples do not recognise him.

This raises the issue of “seeing”. The disciples “see” the person but they do not “see” his identity. This can prompt us to reflect on our own facility for seeing. How much do we take for granted without actually seeing? How might our relationships change with a new “seeing”?

The two travellers, one of whom is now named as “Cleopas”, tell their new companion the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is placed in a geographic location – “of Nazareth”, a small village in Galilee and the disciples call him a “prophet” because of what he said and did before his death. Their account of Jesus holds together the human and the holy. As they continue to speak, we hear that all their hopes have been dashed by the death of Jesus. The horrifying aspects of the materiality of his death are evident as they tell what happened: “Our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death and had him crucified.”

But that is not the end of the story. There is a further confusing event. They tell about the resurrection, setting the story in time and place – “early in the morning”, “two



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days since it all happened”, “at the tomb”. They describe the resurrection as material – not ethereal. The women from their group, they say, witnessed the empty tomb and returned to tell the other disciples.

The new companion begins to speak, telling of “all the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about himself.” The disciples are then able to interpret the Scriptures in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Then we hear that the three companions arrive at the crossroad “when they drew near to the village to which they were going” – either they enter the village as the two disciples intend to do, or continue further along the road, as Jesus begins to do. But at this point the two disciples offer hospitality and Jesus accepts and “went in to

stay with them”.

The narrator continues the story. “While Jesus was with them at the table, he took the bread and said the blessing, then broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised Jesus.” Jesus, the risen one is seen and recognised in his risen body, through the eyes of the two disciples. All the people, places and time in the story convey meaning allowing us to see the interrelationships at the heart of the story.

Many poets and artists through the years have interpreted the Emmaus scene. Among them is 17th-century Spanish artist Diego Velázquez who painted “The Kitchen Maid”. The maid occupies the centre of the painting and shadowy figures of three travellers seated at a table are framed in the background in the top left-hand corner. Though the maid is leaning on the wooden bench surrounded by kitchen materials her focus is not on kitchen matters: she is listening to the conversation in the adjoining room – to the words of resurrection. We could say of her what the evangelist said of the disciples: “Did not her heart burn within her?”

For Us Today


As ecological readers 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 be to 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 by words and actions of gratitude and in the simple but sacred ritual of breaking and sharing bread in hospitality.

The spread of Covid-19 is through contact with bodies. In order to understand how the virus is spread scientists and others had to trace every bodily contact in place and time to get to the source of the infection. Ideas and theories themselves offer little protection whereas simple bodily acts like wearing face masks, handwashing, covering our mouths when coughing are effective, as is staying away from people and places where the virus can be spread. The spread of this illness is another opportunity to open our eyes to our interconnection as a community on the planet. And to respond with sensible precautions but also with compassion for the ill. Pope Francis has asked priests to go out and visit the sick, not hide in fear.

At the heart of the Emmaus story is an urging towards a deeper faith: to recognise and discern, not just to see. Like Cleopas and companion we need to open our eyes to what is before us. As ecological readers, this means being attentive to the material – eyewitness to everything we see around us – but also maturing in our understanding so that we recognise the relationships that form the Earth community. 🙌

Painting: *La Mulata* by Diego Velázquez National Gallery Dublin Public Domain www.commons.wikimedia.org




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VENUE: St Francis Retreat Centre, Hillsborough, Auckland
DATES: 26 - 30 Oct, 2020
COST: \$775.00 (retreat, accom & meals)



Kathleen Duffy SSJ is Professor Emerita of Physics and Director of the Institute of Religion and Science at Chestnut Hill College. She has extensive experience guiding evening, weekend and week-long retreats on topics related to Teilhard’s life and work.

REGISTRATION: <http://ignatianspirituality.nz/retreats/>