

An Eye-Opening Experience  
Luke 24:13 – 35  
May 6, 2018 (Easter 6)

I came across a story online the other week by a man named Tom McFall, who is a student at Youngstown State University:

In one of my Management classes, I sit in the same seat in the front every day. Every single day I sit there, next to a foreign student that barely speaks English. The most advanced thing I've heard him say in English is, "Wow, my muffin is really good." He also has a habit of stacking every item he owns in the exact space where I sit. His bag, his food, his books, and his phone are *always* right on my desk space.

Every single time I walk into class this guy says, "Ah, Tom. You here. Okay." And starts frantically clearing my desk of his belongings. He then makes it a habit to say, "Ready for class, yeah?" And gives me a high five. Every day this guy gives me a high five.

I was *always* annoyed with this guy. I'm thinking, "You know I sit in this seat every day. Why are you always stacking your stuff here? And the last thing I want to do is give a guy who barely speaks my language high fives at 8:00 in the morning. Just get your stuff off my desk."

But today I came to class and was running a few minutes late. I'm standing outside because I had to send a quick text. I could see my usual space right by the door, and of course, my desk was filled with his belongings. The usual.

As I'm standing there on my phone, another student who was also late walks into the room and goes to sit in my seat, since it's closest to the door. The guy with all his stuff on the desk stops

him from sitting down and says, “I’m sorry. My good friend Thomas sits here.” It was then that I realized this guy wasn’t putting his stuff on my seat to *annoy* me. He was saving me the seat every morning. And this whole time he saw me as a friend, but I was too busy thinking about myself to take him into consideration.

I went into class and of course he cleared the seat and said, “Ah, Tom. You here. Okay.” And he gave me a high five. At the end of class I asked him if he wanted to get a bite to eat with me. We did. And we talked for a while. It turns out he had moved here from the Middle East to pursue a college education in America. He plans to go back after he gets his degree. He’s got two kids and a wife. He works full time and sends his all his leftover money back home to his wife.

I asked him how he liked America. He said he misses his family but it’s exciting to be here. He also said, “Not every American is nice to me like you are, Tom.” I bought lunch, and he gave me a high five.

You think you know someone – that you have them all figured out – until you share an experience that opens your eyes to who they really are.

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The two disciples on the road to Emmaus thought they knew who this stranger was – mainly that he was *just* a stranger; just someone else walking along the road. Someone of no real consequence. They even get *annoyed* with him. He butts into their conversation, says, “What are you talking about?” to which *they* say, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have happened there? What do you live under a rock?” But that starts a conversation in which he helps them come to a new understanding of Jesus and their faith and

*themselves*, what they've just experienced with his death and resurrection. That conversation leads to a meal in which their eyes are opened and they see who he truly is. They go back and tell the others how he had been "made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

They thought they knew him, until they shared an experience that opened their eyes to who he really was. Author Henri Nouwen, in writing about this story, says it this way, "Someone listened, understood, and became a friend."<sup>1</sup> Is this not the whole point of the Christian life? To constantly have our eyes opened to the presence of God that is all around us. To listen to others and understand them so that we see them for who they truly are; to see their *humanity* and the very *presence of Christ* in them, in such a way that strangers become friends who are welcomed into the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

If we can do *that* with each other, then all these other problems that divide us will be taken care of. Because you won't allow someone to live in poverty if you truly see the presence of Christ in them. You won't allow someone to go hungry if you truly see the presence of Christ in them. You won't allow someone to be oppressed or to live in injustice if you truly see the presence of Christ in them. You won't hate or ignore someone who is different from you if you truly see the presence of Christ in them. You cannot allow someone to suffer if you truly come to *know* them and see the presence of Christ in them.

So often, we *think* we know someone. We *think* we know exactly who they are and have them all figured out. Either in the sense of, "I like this person and know them well enough that I know all I *need* to know about them," or, "This person is an annoyance, an inconvenience, or a problem, and I do not need to know anything else about them." But Jesus calls us to love God

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*, pg. 122.

and to love our neighbor and to love our enemies. And you can only truly love someone when you *know* them; when you come to see the image of God and the presence of Christ in them. So the Christian life must be a constant pursuit of *knowing*; of sharing experiences that open our eyes to who this person truly is and allow us to see Christ in them. And so many times that happens over a *meal*.

There is a book (which was made into a movie last year) called *Wonder*. It's the story of a boy named Augie who was born with severe facial deformities. He's in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and is going to school for the first time with other kids. They're all afraid of him because he looks so different from them. Every day he sits alone in the cafeteria and eats his lunch. The other kids stare at him and make jokes. One girl feels bad for him, so she goes over and sits with him. They start eating lunch together every day. She *listens* to him and comes to *understand* him, and she discovers that he's just like everyone else. They become friends, and the other kids *see* this, and *they* start to come over to the table to eat with them. Through the simple act of eating together, their eyes are opened to who he truly is; they come to *know* each other, and they are drawn into fellowship.

When we share a meal with someone, it forces us to be *present* with them. To take time with them and listen to them. Whether we already know that person, whether they are a stranger, or whether we are at odds with them, there is something about *eating together* that is intimate and personal and removes barriers that keep us from one another.

That's why churches spend so much time *eating* together (potlucks, lunches after funerals, breakfasts or lunches throughout the week, ice cream breaks with the youth). So much of our life together is centered on eating. And one of the *central acts* of our life together is sharing a

meal. When we come to this table, it is not just so that I as an individual can be fed and nourished in my relationship with God. It is so we as a community can be fed and nourished in our relationships with God *and with each other*. Because when we share this meal with people we *love* and people we *like* and people we *tolerate* and people for whom *none of that* is true, the hope is that as we see them sharing Christ's body and blood, we might see Christ's presence in them. That our eyes would be opened to them, and their eyes would be opened to us, and we would all be drawn into deeper fellowship in Christ.

So as we come to this table in just a moment, come with those you *know* and those you *do not*. Come with those you *like* and those you *do not*. And as we share this meal together, *look* at one another. *See* one another. You might *think* you know someone, that you have them figured out, but take another look. Let your eyes be opened to them and see Christ's presence in them, so that we might *all* be made known in the breaking of the bread. We practice that *here* so that you can go out and do it with every *other* meal and interaction that you share.

Take another look at someone. Don't just assume that you know who they are. Take the time to listen to them and understand them and *know* them. Because in knowing *them*, you might come to better know *Christ*.