

## NOT FOUND ON THE MAP

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Here's the thing about Emmaus. It never existed—or if it did, we have no evidence for it. Archaeologists haven't discovered its ancient foundations, and its existence isn't mentioned in any ancient text except Luke's gospel. Yet it also seems peculiar that Luke would make up such a place, and so its existence is one of the great missing links of Biblical scholarship. This is especially true when we consider that Luke is also quite precise about where it was located: about seven miles from Jerusalem. If ever there was a place that “wasn't on the map,” Emmaus seems to have been it.

And maybe that's the point. We just heard about two of Jesus' disciples—they clearly aren't two of the twelve apostles—who are trying to make sense of the bewildering last few days. (Remember, we're still in the evening of Easter Day; Jesus' resurrection happened only a few hours before.) Like many of us, they're trying to process this by going on a long walk. Perhaps they've even decided to “get out of Dodge”—as it were—to try to find a place where they can clear their heads and deal with their confusion, grief, and—yes—disbelief. So if Emmaus didn't exist, Luke might be telling us that these two, in their attempts to run away from their sorrow and disappointment, were simply on the road to nowhere.

You see, while this is ultimately a story about a resurrection appearance, it's also a story about grief and how we deal with it. Which makes me wonder if the place and its name, Emmaus—in English it would be translated “Warm Springs”—is entirely symbolic. Perhaps these two aren't running away after all. Maybe they're trying to find a place of warmth and renewal where they can try to make sense of what's happened and begin to heal.

But here's yet another angle. A few years ago, I heard a lecture by a colleague's aunt, the English theologian Jenny Read-Heimerdinger. In these lectures she said that the oldest extant versions of Luke's gospel give the place name as *Oulammaus*. This is significant because the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) says the place where Jacob was visited by God in a dream was Oulammaus. (This itself is a mistranslation of the actual name “Luz,” but the only text available to a first-century Gentile like Luke was the Septuagint.) You'll recall that when Jacob awoke from the dream he said, “Surely God was in this place—and I did not know it!” So maybe Emmaus—Oulammaus—is a place of rest and refreshment, *as well as* a place of holy encounter, a place where the unconquered life of the divine is made visible.

Well—so what? How about this to begin with? Each of us knows what it's like when life gets to be too much and we want to run away from all of our problems and hurts and pain—and sometimes even from ourselves. The problem is, no matter where we go, there we are, and there life is, too. Because even if we can evade life for a time, we can't escape it; sooner or later it catches up with us and sober reality sets in. This is especially true where grief is concerned.

One of the things I hear from people who are grieving is that keeping busy helps. And of course, it does—in a way. It helps to keep the terrible reality of the situation at a safe distance. It helps us not to brood and become unduly remorseful. It even helps us simply to get through the day without cracking up.

When you think about it, we talk about all the time about being busy—busy with work, travel, volunteering—and whatever else. We're always on the run. But from what? Not only from grief for all of the losses we've borne but also from what psychologists call "anticipatory grief": a feeling we get when we're uncertain about what the future holds. Often this anticipatory grief's about death, especially in the face of a dire diagnosis. But it's also about more broadly imagined futures, about the coming storms of war, economic collapse, environmental catastrophe—about everything we find comfortable and familiar going to Hell. It grieves us that there's not much we can do about this, so we keep busy, or at least distracted with social media and all kinds of binging.

This anticipatory grief can be remarkably paralyzing, so sometimes the only way to deal with it *is* to flee—even if we don't know to what or to whom. You see, just as there's life after the death of a loved one—a different life, of course, but life all the same—so there's healing and wholeness and meaning to be found along the road.

Many of you know that friends and former colleagues out west thought I was mad to come out here to what was, for me, the great unknown. My parents certainly thought so. But they also knew I was unhappy and only the other day I was reflecting on how I have discovered in many ways what resurrection—new life—really means and feels like. "Maybe it was madness to leave all the familiar behind," I said a while ago. "But it was also a Godly madness."

My dear friends, even when we can't believe it, we know that after every ending there's a new beginning, and even in the midst of loss we can be surprised by joy. Even though you're on the Emmaus Road to nowhere—and I still am, too—the good news is it's also a road that takes us where we need to go. Though it's not on the map, it's found in the minds and eyes and hearts of all who can perceive the Risen Christ when he comes alongside them in unexpected encounters. And when he comes alongside, he says that even though the world may be going to Hell, he's been there, and Hell now has no more power except the power we give it. And though we may try to evade this risen One, we cannot escape him any more than we can escape the Easter promise that even along the road there is life to be lived and love to be shared in anticipation of the final journey, whose promise is now broken open before our eyes.