

Sunday, May 4, 2014: Luke 24:13-35

## **Our eyes drink in the world around us, but our brains develop filters. I imagine Cleopas and his friend sifting carefully through what they have seen.**

by [Yvette Schock](#) in the [April 30, 2014](#) issue

Lately, I have spent hours each day surveying my newborn son's face. While he sleeps I examine his fine eyelashes, note the flush of his cheek, and watch as his expressions swiftly shift. When he's awake, I covet the moments when he stares into my eyes. When his gaze wanders elsewhere, I turn to see where he is looking, trying to discern what captures his attention.

He can see clearly only what is eight to 12 inches from his face. But this does not keep him from searching beyond this field of clear vision, and he often stares intently where I don't think there's much for him to see: at a bare wall, or a particular shelf in our bookcase, or the base of an unremarkable lamp. His attention draws mine, and I see details I would not otherwise have noticed. The bare wall is in fact marked by a broad stripe of shadow. On the bookshelf, a star of light winks from the corner of a glossy dust jacket. The slender, straight lines of the lamp's base create a black-and-white pattern on the wall.

Much of what passes into the range of our sight doesn't register. This is a matter of survival. We begin life unable to organize and categorize our sensory experience. Our blurry, weak vision as infants protects us from an assault of incomprehensible light, color, and movement. But eventually we develop the capacity to cope with all of these stimuli by focusing on some of them and ignoring the rest. Our eyes drink in the world around us, but our brains develop filters so that we actually see only the necessary things.

In their conversation on the road to Emmaus, I imagine the two disciples sifting carefully through what they themselves have seen and what they have heard from

others throughout the week before. They are trying to discern the necessary things to help them understand what has happened—and what they are to do in the wake of such loss and disappointment.

When a fellow traveler approaches and asks what they are discussing, they list for him those “things about Jesus of Nazareth” that seem most important: Jesus’ identity and betrayal, their hopes, the rumors of his resurrection, and the tomb—found empty, just as the women reported. It is a decent summary of the important details, but the traveler finds it lacking. He reminds them at length of the promises of redemption found in the scriptures. Yet the disciples still do not recognize that the one speaking to them is Jesus. They look, but they do not see.

Finally, when Jesus sits with the disciples at their table, takes the bread, and blesses and breaks it, their eyes are opened. They recognize the pattern of his movements; they feel the familiar pull of the holy drawing them into communion, embracing them. They see Jesus.

The summer after my sophomore year in college, I moved home to work and save money in preparation for living abroad the next semester. I also volunteered at a fair-trade gift store operated by the local Mennonite congregation. Occasionally the church’s pastor came in to do the books or check inventory, and we often fell into conversation. After two years of global studies and economics courses, I was full of righteous zeal for every kind of cause for justice. I’m sure I spoke passionately about current events, environmental catastrophe, and all manner of situations of injustice around the world.

Then one day, Pastor Long asked a question I could not answer: “What examples of injustice do you see around here?” After a pause—long enough to allow me to respond, but not so long as to unkindly underscore my inability to—he began to speak about the migrant workers in the nearby orchards and fields of eastern Washington. He told me about the poverty they left behind in their home countries and the discrimination and harsh living and working conditions they faced in the United States. As he spoke, my eyes were opened: I realized that I had spent the first 18 years of my life *not seeing* a whole group of people who shared space in the place I called home. Even when I returned home with a growing passion for justice, the blinders that had limited my vision in my childhood and youth remained.

I cannot fault the disciples for not recognizing the risen Christ. Left on my own, my vision is like theirs, or like my infant son's—blurred, blocked, and incomplete. My conversation with Pastor Long was, for me, an Emmaus experience: a moment of stark recognition that altered my perception. It changed what and who I noticed that summer.

But it was just one experience. My vision needs retuning all the time. So I find comfort in the Emmaus story: Jesus does not leave the disciples on their own, blind to the reality of resurrection. In their grief they cannot see enough to go looking for him, so he finds them. He walks with them and takes a place at their table—though they do not recognize him. In the breaking of bread, he opens their eyes to his presence with them all along. And the filters are stripped away—filters of disappointment, loss, isolation, and fear that kept them from seeing.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, Simon has also seen Jesus. When Cleopas and his companion crash breathlessly into the room, they all clutch at one another's arms, and their words tumble out together: "Jesus is risen!" Together they become the seeds of a new community whose seeing has been transformed; together they will continue to witness signs of the resurrection and to see the presence of Christ all around.