

Who is Cleopas? (Luke 24:13-35)

Whoever he is, he's as upset as the 12-turned-11.

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The Emmaus story is one we know well, but it does raise some interesting questions.

First of all, who is Cleopas? He's not one of the 12. We know that because he's not listed in Luke's list of disciples--along with the fact that when he leaves Emmaus to return to Jerusalem, he finds the 11 there (no Judas, of course). So who is he?

His story comes right after Peter has gone to the tomb and found it empty, so Cleopas must be in the inner circle--word hasn't had time to spread farther. And Luke says that "two of them" are going to Emmaus--disciples were instructed to go out by twos. So are there more than 12 disciples? Is this another band of followers?

Whoever he is, he's as upset as the 12 become 11.

And who's with Cleopas? His wife? Perhaps. But Luke, of all the Gospel writers, would likely have made it known that there was a female disciple. On the other hand, there almost had to be. All those men journeying without any women? Could they really handle things on their own? And would they really have left their kids and spouses at home? Isn't saying they left everything behind just a literary device to suggest that they did, in fact, give up a lot to follow? They couldn't have left *everything*, right?

When Cleopas and his companion return to Jerusalem, the 11 are there with *their companions*. Spouses? Friends? More disciples? Luke never tells.

And where do they go? Emmaus, of course. But we don't know where that is. Yet interestingly Cleopas and his companion seem to have arranged for a place to stay, since they urge Jesus to "stay with us." Do they live in Emmaus? Is this another place the gospel has spread--another place that is going to be devastated by Jesus' death? Are Cleopas and his companion going back to life as they knew it? Would the next day mean fishing or tax collecting, since following Jesus didn't work out so well? It's worth some reflection.

As is the phrase "came near": "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near." This should call to mind another phrase: "The kingdom of God has come near." Jesus just said these very words a few chapters earlier, when he told the disciples to go out in twos. And Cleopas and his companion are doing that! So now they just need to remember that when they are welcomed and cure the sick, the kingdom of God comes near, God's hopes and dreams for the world come near, the Messiah comes near. They need to remember this--but they don't. They forget or misunderstand, just like we do.

And yet it is to the two of them--the two he has come near to who still don't understand--that Jesus eventually reveals himself. This should give us hope. For when we don't remember or don't understand, God may be poised to reveal God's self to us as well. And God may come near as many times as needed, until we finally see and understand.