

Heartburn

April 19, 2026

One of the stories that my husband and I love to tell about our origin story is how a mutual friend introduced us, and then, almost immediately, was a contestant on MasterChef. She was Gordon Ramsey's darling that season, and made it all the way to the final four! The night before she left for L.A., my husband taught her how to make homemade pasta, and so you can only imagine the knot in his stomach during the entire episode where she replicated his recipe.

All of this meant that early on in our relationship, we weren't just getting to know each other; we were hosting watch parties. Cheering. Debating the merits of timed challenges. Arguing over whether the lamb was overcooked or the judges were just being dramatic. And somewhere along the way, something shifted. What started as "we know someone on TV" became woven into the DNA of our relationship.

Now, on nights when the world feels especially heavy and we're running on fumes, "Beat Bobby Flay" is basically our lullaby. Put on a cooking show, and we're out.

Which is funny, because cooking shows are not actually restful. They're intense. Timers counting down. Judges making pronouncements. People's dreams rising and falling on a perfectly plated dish.

And yet—we keep watching. Because it's compelling. It draws you in. You can almost taste it. Almost.

But that's the thing. Watching someone else taste something incredible will only get you so far. At some point, your body knows the difference. At some point, you find yourself standing in front of the fridge during a commercial break, because observation is not the same thing as participation. You can admire it. Analyze it. Even be inspired by it. But until you taste it, it hasn't actually become part of you.

And that might be the problem—and the invitation—at the heart of this strange, beautiful story on the road to Emmaus. Because these two disciples? They are walking away from Jerusalem with nothing but analysis. They are replaying everything. Cross-examining the facts. Trying to make sense of what just happened.

"We had hoped," they say. Not we hope. Not we're still holding on. "We had hoped."

It's such a small shift in language. Past tense. Imperfect. And yet it carries the weight of everything that has collapsed.

That small shift in tense carries a world of grief. It's the language of ICU waiting rooms. It's the language of broken movements and betrayed promises. It's the language of people who thought liberation was coming, and then watched it be executed in public.

We had hoped the diagnosis would be different. We had hoped the system would protect people instead of harming them. We had hoped liberation was actually coming.

They had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem—to liberate—Israel. Not metaphorically. Not someday. Actually.

And then the state executed him. Publicly. Brutally. As a warning.

So of course they're leaving. Of course they're talking it through. Of course they're trying to make sense of how something that felt so full of promise ended in such devastating, humiliating failure.

And then this stranger shows up. An outsider. A paroikos (a word that can faithfully be translated as "immigrant"). Someone who doesn't belong. Someone who, in their eyes, clearly hasn't been paying attention.

"Are you the only one who doesn't know what just happened?" they ask him. Which is almost funny, right? Because he's the only one who actually does. But notice this: they don't recognize him. Not when he walks with them. Not when he listens to their grief. Not even when he opens the scriptures and starts connecting dots they couldn't see.

Something is happening, though. "Were not our hearts burning within us?" they'll say later. Burning.

And we love that image. It sounds so holy. So inspiring. There are museums full of art depicting their hearts burning within them.

But let's be honest, sometimes when something is burning inside you, it doesn't feel like clarity. It feels like heartburn. Uncomfortable. Persistent. Impossible to ignore. Something is shifting, but you can't quite name it yet. Their hearts are burning...but their eyes are still closed.

Which is a good image for faith that stays at a distance. Because it's possible, common even, to be moved. To feel something stir. To sit through a beautiful explanation of scripture and think, wow, that was powerful...and still not see. Still not recognize what's right in front of you. Because recognition, in this story, doesn't come through observation. It comes through participation.

"Stay with us," they say to the stranger. Which is not a small thing. Not then. Not now.

Because hospitality is not just about being nice. It's about making room. It's about choosing to trust. It's about opening your life to someone you don't fully understand. It means making room for someone who might disrupt your sense of safety, your categories, your expectations. It means trusting that something holy might show up in someone you've been taught to overlook—or fear.

And when they sit down at the table—when bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given—that's when their eyes are opened. Not during the walk. Not as the as-yet-not-recognized Jesus helps them to reframe the story. But during the meal.

Because resurrection, it turns out, is not something you finally understand from a distance. It's something you participate in. It's something you taste.

Have you ever thought about the fact that taste is the only sense you can't engage from a distance? You can see, hear, smell, and feel things from a distance, but taste requires proximity. They had to get close enough to Jesus in order to taste what he was sharing.

Then suddenly, they see him. Not on the road. Not in the analysis. But in the act of sharing a meal. Because resurrection is not something you finally understand from a safe distance. It's something you taste.

And just as quickly as they recognize him—he's gone. Which feels almost unfair. Like, really? Now? But maybe that's the mercy of it.

Because if he had stayed, they might be tempted to hold onto that one moment, that one place, that one table. Build a shrine. Freeze it in time.

Instead, he vanishes—so that they have to go looking for him everywhere. In every table. In every act of welcome. In every moment of shared bread. In every stranger you meet along the way.

The long and short of it is, if you want to find him, don't just watch, participate.

And that lands us squarely in the world we're actually living in, a world where so many people are saying, like the disciples, "we had hoped." We had hoped families wouldn't be ripped apart by immigration enforcement that treats human beings like problems to be removed rather than beloved children of God. We had hoped trans kids wouldn't have to fight just to exist—that their dignity wouldn't be debated in legislative chambers like it's optional. We had hoped that cruelty wouldn't become so normalized that it starts to feel inevitable. We had hoped—fill in the blank. You know the sentences. You've said them. We had hoped.

And here's the temptation in a moment like this: to become spectators. To watch the suffering. To analyze the policies. To talk about justice like it's a cooking show we're following from the couch.

But the Emmaus story refuses to allow us that distance. Because the risen Christ shows up as the outsider. The one mistaken for the immigrant. The one not recognized. The one who doesn't quite belong.

And he is only seen, only known, when he is welcomed in, only known when they allow themselves to get close enough to taste what he's sharing. Which means if we are serious about wanting to see Christ, we may have to look exactly where we've been told not to look. Among the strangers. Among the targeted. Among the ones our culture keeps pushing to the margins.

And not just look—but make room. Sit down. Share bread. Risk relationship. Because in this story, hospitality is not just kindness. It's how we come to know what is real. It's resurrection.

Friends, the stark reality is that sometimes this kind of faith burns. Sometimes it feels like heartburn—like something rising up in you that won't let you go back to sleep, won't let you stay comfortable, won't let you pretend you didn't see what you saw.

But that burning? That's often where resurrection starts. Because those two disciples don't stay at the table. They get up. They turn around. And they go back to Jerusalem, to the dangerous place they had just fled.

Resurrection sends them back into the world they were ready to give up on, sends US back into the world we are ready to give up on, not because everything is fixed, but because something has been tasted, because we've gotten a taste of something real enough, alive enough, sacred enough, to risk everything for.

So maybe the question for us isn't just whether our hearts are burning. Maybe the question is whether we're willing to follow that fire beyond the table and back out into the world. Because faith that never leaves the couch, never risks the table, never makes room for the stranger, that faith might be interesting. It might even be comforting.

But it will never taste like resurrection, and truthfully, faith from a distance will never give us a taste of the real Jesus here in our midst. Because if this is real—if resurrection is real—then it will not let us stay comfortable. It will send us back out into a world where strangers are still treated like threats, where some are told they don't belong, where too many are still saying, "we had hoped." It will send us to pull up a chair where there wasn't one before, to make room, to retell the stories until they make sense, to stand with those the world is trying to push aside.

Because that burning in your chest? That's not just a feeling. That's resurrection refusing to stay contained. That's Christ already ahead of you, waiting to be recognized in the breaking of bread, and in the building of a more just world.

So come to the table. Come close enough to feel it, to taste it, that stirring, that burning, that holy discomfort. Not just to understand, but to be changed. Close enough that the fire in your chest won't let you go back to who you were before.

And when your heart is burning because you consumed Love and Justice and Hope, don't stay there. Get up. Turn around. Go back into the world that needs you. Because resurrection doesn't end at the table. It sends us from it.

May it be so. Alleluia and Amen.

Rev. Bridget Flad Daniels
Union Congregational United Church of Christ
Green Bay, Wisconsin
Psalm 16, Luke 24:13-35
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