The Gospel we just heard is one of the more beloved stories in the New Testament. Two disciples are walking on the road to the village of Emmaus, some 7 miles southeast of Jerusalem.

Archaeologists today are at a loss to locate Emmaus, so was Josephus in the first century and the church historian Eusebius in the early fourth century. No one quite knows where this village was, only that in the time of Jesus, it was well known, a geographical marker lost in the sands of time.

Luke tells the story with detail and suspense. These two disciples make their way with heavy hearts as the sun is setting on that first Easter. As they take one “lead-footed” step after another, hearts weighed down with grief… a stranger comes alongside them. “While they were talking and discussing,” writes Luke, “Jesus himself came
near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

One tiny detail of the story catches my imagination. How could these disciples **not** recognize their master, the One who multiplied bread and fish, healed the sick, held thousands in the grip of his parables and teachings? What was it about that journey and those followers and that road that day that kept them from recognizing the stranger who traveled with them? Most troubling of all, could we who consider ourselves “faithful” not recognize our Lord when he joins us today?

The more I think about those questions, the more it occurs to me that all of us are like those first disciples. Like them, we journey from some Jerusalem to a place called Emmaus. We too have our grief and questions, uncertainties and misgivings, frail hopes and even frailer faith. What if this stranger who traveled with those disciples long ago could travel with us? What would that look like and how might it change every journey we take from now on?
One of the obvious details of this story is how the stranger joins us on the particular road we choose to take. Too often, we misbelieve our Lord, thinking that the Christian experience is all about aligning our lives with God’s program for our lives. Oh, there is a place for taking stock of where we are and what God expects of us and whether or not we are living fully in God’s grace. But don’t miss what this story is saying clearly. The risen Lord joins these disciples on their journey, walking the road they chose, at the pace they chose to walk.

The story creates a beautiful picture of God coming to us where we are, just as we are, going with us wherever life is taking us. Times are, we wander from God’s will and way, choosing selfishness over generosity and quick pleasures over lasting joy. Wherever we are, whatever road we find ourselves on, the risen Lord comes to walk with us. His presence may be at first seem strange to us. Why doesn’t he identify himself, appearing in all his risen glory?
When the stranger joins them on the road, **notice how he asks about things important to them.** If the risen Lord appeared on the road in glowing resurrection robes, their concerns might never have been voiced. When the stranger appears, his gentleness and humility give a space in which he can ask them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” Can you hear God asking you, “What matters to you?” An in the asking, letting you and me know that he cares for us so much, that no question of ours, no issue, no concern is off limits.

We often find ourselves with life questions that seem to have no answers. *Not every question* on our minds has an immediate answer; some can never be answered. The stranger who is the risen Lord cares more about where **we** are… than where **he** is; more about our earthly struggles than his heavenly glory. Because we meet him this way, we cannot help but love him, hoping he will travel with us a long time.
Third, this walk to Emmaus reminds us the risen Lord, the mysterious stranger, offers us his abiding presence. We saw this resurrection gift in last week’s story about the disciples and Thomas. For all the mystery surrounding Easter -- empty tomb, angel announcements, a stone rolled away -- the one message is that God does not abandon us to the hearing of Easter’s words. We hear, “He is risen!” and that is awesome good news! But the glory of Easter is not the words! The Glory of Easter, is the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Christ is risen AND with us!

The disciples, trudging from city to village, from loss into the dark valley of grief, really don’t need any more words. What they need is the presence of the One who will never abandon us to fear, despair, grief, and ultimately death. The stranger who travels with us offers us himself. That gift,… and the continuing reality of that gift, shows up in the last detail of the story.
Once they reach the end of the road, in the village of Emmaus, the disciples implore the stranger to “stay with us, eat with us”. And when they sit at table, the stranger takes bread, blesses it and gives it to them. “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.” This stranger who travels with us shows himself as the One who died and rose again, the One who breaks bread with us, who feeds us with his very life. When we eat the bread he blesses and breaks, we share his life now and always. The risen Lord reveals himself not as stranger, but nourishing, giving, loving friend. Every time we gather at the Lord’s Table for Eucharist, we are reminded of this good news. In the awareness of his presence with us, life transforms itself from grief into hope, from night into day.

Could it be that on our way today or tomorrow, the risen Lord might travel with us first as a stranger and then as living Lord? Might he come and join us where we are? I think so. No, actually I know this to be so, because he has joined me and (and I bet if you pause to think about it…) you along the road and feeds us with his very life. We know
he travels with us because we could not have made it this far without his guiding, loving presence. Yes, we know he goes with us. God give us the grace to go with him wherever the road may lead. Amen.