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In the last chapter of Luke's gospel, we catch two of Jesus followers in the act of missing the point, which is, if you've read this far in the gospels, you know is practically their vocation. They are professionals at being confused. They have a gift of never understanding what is happening. And their story is one of my favorite ways of talking about where we find ourselves in the Episcopal Church today.

In Luke 24 it's just a few hours after the women went to the tomb and found that the body of Jesus was not there and so instead of staying to find out what's going on to check out the story, Cleopas and his companion decide to make their way out of Jerusalem. They're headed the wrong way -- out of Jerusalem -- away from the disciples, away from the women who had been the last pastors and protectors of the cross, and the first ones at the empty tomb. They've heard the good news, proclaimed from the first ones to learn that Christ is risen, and they can't get away from it fast enough. Cleopas in his companion, heard something unsettling from people who can't possibly be trustworthy, and they are on their way. They're out of there. Not only do they not believe the story, they do not believe that the messengers of that story. Not only do they not believe that Jesus has risen, but it's not really possible that the news that changes everything could come from women.

Now it's easy to mock them until you think about all the ways that we Episcopalians do the same thing. We find ourselves headed in the wrong way on the road to Emmaus when we can't hear the truth from voices that are marginalized. When we can't hear the truth from unlikely sources, from people on

the edge, from the people who think we really don't have any business delivering any truth to us. When we can't imagine reorganizing ourselves or restructuring our churches to make room at the center for the voices that God trusts with the truth. Like Cleopas and his companion, we hear those voices, and we take off in the other direction for the comfort of our institutional structures as they are, our endowments, and the way we've always done it.

Thankfully, God does not give up on them or on us. Jesus comes to walk with Cleopas and his companion, but they don't know it is him. As they pour out their tale of woe, they really do start to sound like Episcopalian sometimes. We had hoped that Jesus would be the one to come and redeem Israel, they say, we had hoped. We had hoped our children would find faith in the church in the way that we found it when we were young. We wanted the recipe of Sunday School, church camp and family devotions that had shaped us to shape them, too. We'd hoped that every stewardship campaign would hit its goal, and the chefs behind it every pancake supper would have to send somebody out for extra eggs. That everybody we knew would drop in on the parish picnic. That all our churches will be standing room only on Christmas Eve. And failing that, we hoped at least our children would grow up on a spiritual landscape we still recognize so that our churches could proclaim the gospel in ways that we understood. We had hoped.

But Jesus by opening the scriptures and breaking the bread opens their eyes. When the scripture was read to them and when the bread was broken, their eyes opened, and here's the thing: They didn't even know their eyes were closed until they were opened.

Friends in the next nine years in the Episcopal Church, we're going to have many opportunities to head in the wrong way, away from the voices that God has chosen to bear witness to God's mission in this broken world. But it will also be filled with chances to be freed from the past, from what we had hoped, and marshal our resources to meet the challenges of the future we could not have seen, would not have believed.

The next presiding bishop must keep us listening to the voices that can breathe fresh air and new light and life into our beloved church. And help us hear the testimony of the women at the empty tomb, to recognize Jesus on the road, to take the risks that truly opening our eyes requires us to take, and allow us to embrace fully the knowledge that people we don't yet recognize, those on the margin and sometimes those in the center, will meet us on the road to tell us Christ is risen. And we will never be the same.