

April 23, 2023

“INCOGNITO”

Luke 24:13-16

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

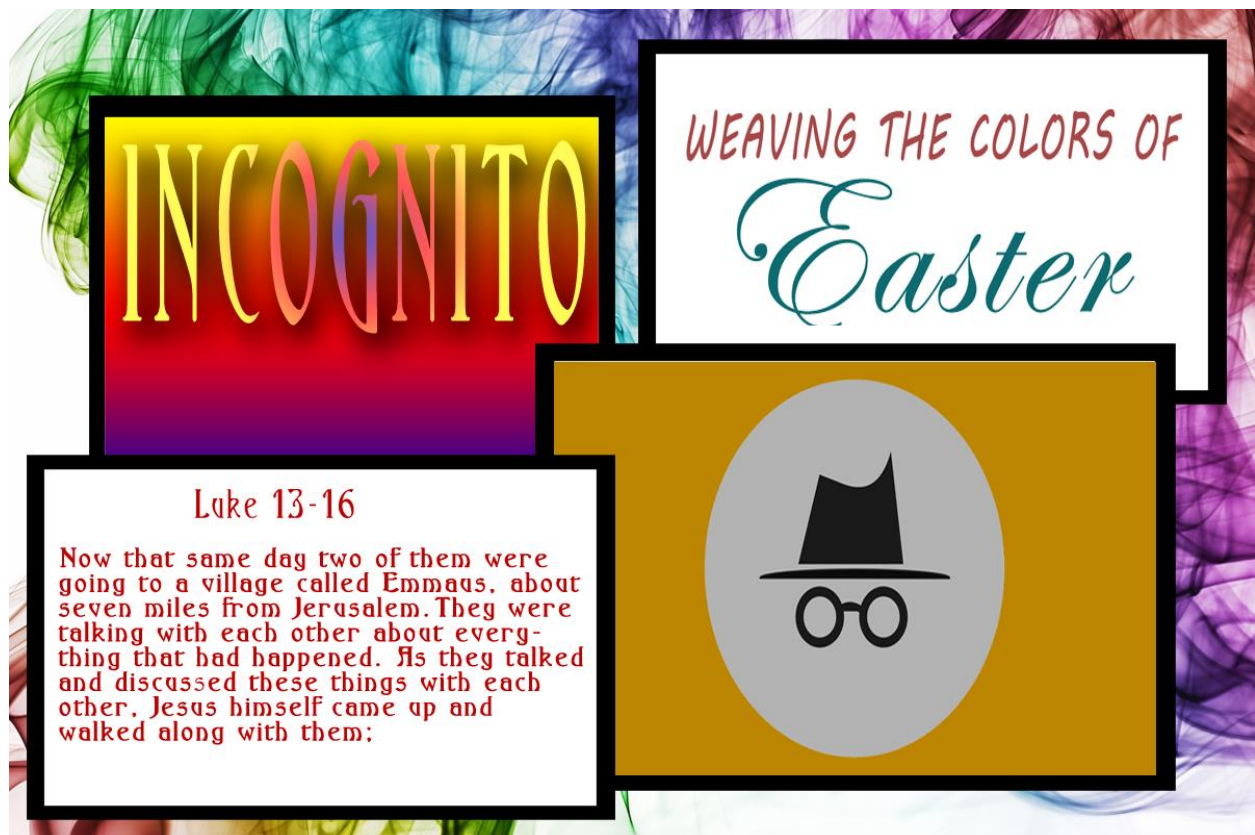
14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;

16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

Special Music: “On the Road to Emmaeus” The Steeles

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-E\\_mA2linM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-E_mA2linM)



## **UNRECOGNIZABLE**

The mist is a haunting friend  
Making ghosts of pleasant thoughts  
Advancing my mind towards  
Recognition and cognition  
Separating truth from fiction.  
At what point does a lie become rumor  
And rumor become truth?  
How can one tell in the wispy mist?  
If I trip on a root,  
Does that make the tree a reality?  
If I hear the call of a bird,  
Does that prove that the bird is real?  
Can the mist of my sorrow and grief  
Create false impressions on my mind?  
He is dead.  
Crucified.  
Buried.  
But the rumors!  
Could they be true?  
Or is it the mist entangling  
My spirit with hopes  
And forbidden suppositions?  
Did you hear?  
He is alive!  
And, suddenly,  
The veil is lifted

**The mist extinguished  
And He sits at my table  
Eating bread, drinking wine  
Holes in His hands  
Scar in His side  
And I find the truth in His eyes  
As my confusion is abandoned  
To the reality of my risen savior.**

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Recently, a highly renowned photographer by the name of Boris Eldagsen enters the World Photography Organization's 2023 Sony World Photography Awards. His photograph entitled "The Electrician" was presented as an old photograph of two women, one behind the other. The photograph is stunning. The judges must have thought so, too, because they offered him first prize in his category.

And Eldagsen refused the prize. Why asked why he would turn down such a prestigious award when he clearly was the winner, he told the crowd that the whole thing was an experiment. The photograph was not a photograph at all, but the creation of an AI interface on his computer. Artificial Intelligence, regardless of whether we might feel that it is true intelligence, still doesn't process anything on it's own. It requires some input to provide output. Eldagsen had to input a great deal of instructions to the computer to get it to generate the image that he would call "The Electrician." He thinks of the computer as his medium when he produces this kind of art. Eldagsen explained the process he used and then said, "Just as photography replaced painting in the reproduction of reality, AI will replace photography."

I, myself, don't agree with that statement. I think painting is still just as viable an art form as it has always been. I also believe that photography is another art form that came later. And it may also be true that AI generated art and music will become an art form as well. However, from what I understand about AI images, the picture is based on nothing but suggested input. I will admit that I am finding it harder to and harder to distinguish AI and advanced CGI separate

from reality. Visually, it is very impressive and every day it becomes more impressive. Can we see a future where movies are all AI generated and studios no longer deal with the rising costs of working with actors. Between green screens and animation, do we really know where a politician is speaking to us from? Or even if it is the politician doing the speaking?

I struggle with this because, as a creative person, I see what I produce not as algorithmic, but as the emotion driven, pain given, birth pangs of creation. I have to work hard at it and for it. I admit that there might be some pride in me when I am unwilling to accept that a binary, number crunching device can do something as well or better than me. Sometimes, I feel like John Henry facing “The Mighty Steam Drill”. Maybe I feel like my purpose is fading away, just as people with manufacturing jobs feel when they are replaced by machines. AI is already being used to write content for the internet. And as bad as people are about proofreading their own content before posting it, I wonder if there will be any improvement when they post content generated by AI.

There are times in our lives when most of us want to not be recognized in public. Celebrities have this problem all the time and use parts of disguises so that they won't be recognized by the general public. When a person is famous, two things generally happen:

1. People want to be around that person, want to meet that person, want to be a part of that person's circle. Take a selfie with that person to show their friends. That has to be so very annoying.

**2. When we get around someone famous, we often do not act like ourselves. We don't want to appear foolish, don't want to take a chance of them avoiding us. We want them to like us because then we might get to hang around with them more.**

**The really strange part about all of that is we want to be like them while they want to be like us. The jealousy runs in both directions. I've known more than my fair share of celebrities in my life and most of them just wanted to be able to be themselves when they are away from the cameras, maybe do a little shopping, or have dinner without being hounded by the press and the public. I truly do not envy their position in society where there is always some idiot of a photographer trying to get a picture of them from the limbs of a tree. Most of them want to lead truly normal lives rather than slip on the face of the image people have of them. I never want to live a life where I have to make a crucial decision of what I am going to where in my own back yard to garden.**

**And sometimes, people put on an alternate face just so we will be ourselves when we are around them, one that we don't recognize. Such is the case in the story of the "The Road to Emmaus."**

**13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.**

**14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.**

**We don't really know much about these men. But we do know this:**

**One was named Cleopas (Luke 24:18)**

**Neither was one of the eleven but both were followers of Christ.**

**Both had heard that Christ had heard rumors of the resurrection..**

**We don't know why they were going to Emmaus, but it may be that Emmaus was home to at least one of them. Perhaps they wanted to return home and share the wonderful news of the Resurrection to the people there. The distance was about seven miles.**

**The news of Jesus' resurrection must have spread like wildfire through Jerusalem that morning. The ladies who went to the tomb were sharing the story and Mary Magdalene was sharing how Jesus had appeared to her. The disciples had found the tomb empty. It's just not possible to keep news like this contained.**

**So, here we have Cleopas and his friend walking the seven miles of dusty road to Emmaus discussing everything they had heard. They were probably filling in parts of the story that one had heard and the other one had not. There may even have been some disagreement over the details.**

**Suddenly, a third man joins them on the journey. The Bible tells us that this man was Jesus but that they did not recognize Him. His true identity was hidden from them. These men had walked and talked with Jesus, learned from Him, followed Him while He was still alive. They would have known Him if he had not been disguised in some way.**

**This third man asks the two what they are discussing so intently, and Cleopas is quick to respond:**

**“Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”**

It is a question of amazement. “What planet have you been on that you wouldn’t have heard what was going on over the last few days? Weren’t you in Jerusalem when they arrested, dragged, and sentenced Jesus of Nazareth to death? Were you the only person who didn’t watch them dragging him through the streets as they forced him to wear a crown of thorns and carry His own cross? Are you the only one who did not see them hang Him on the cross until He was dead and quickly buried? And haven’t you heard this morning that He is risen from the dead and has been seen by Simon and Mary? Everybody knows about it. It’s the talk of Jerusalem. Do you have wax in your ears that you haven’t heard?” That whole message summed up in:

**“Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”**

Oh, the patience of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus asks “What things?” they go on to school Him on what has happened over the last few days, and He still doesn’t reveal Himself. He knows that they would not have spoken so freely if they had known who He was. But these two men on the “Road to Emmaus” who were schooling Jesus were about to be schooled as Jesus says to them:

**25 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!**



**26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"**

He then proceeds to explain the “Big Picture” to them. Something that He has done before but just didn’t make a lot of sense to them before the Crucifixion. He tells them that all the scriptures and prophecies led to this moment. He put the Crucifixion and the Resurrection into context regarding not only Christ’s teachings on earth, but through the very inception of humankind as the children of God and what was necessary to lead them back to their Creator. And He did all this without revealing who He was because He needed them to focus on the message, not the miracle of the Resurrection. If He had told them who He was, that would have been all they wanted to talk about and would never have been as candid with Him regarding their feelings and understandings.

As the three men approached Emmaus, Jesus continued down the road as if going on. But the two men begged Him to stay the night. After all, it was almost evening. I feel that Jesus was waiting for this invitation but wasn’t going to force it. Were these men wanting to hear more? Were they really interested in the context over the miracle? Obviously so, because they invited Him to stay so that they could continue with the conversation.

It was only when they sat down to eat and Jesus broke the bread that they recognized who He was. Like a veil lifted, mask removed. With this revelation, Jesus disappeared. Even though these men had just walked seven miles and ready for bed, because of their excitement they got up and returned to Jerusalem to let everyone know what had happened.

**They have been in the presence of Jesus, the Crucified, Jesus the Resurrected, without even knowing it. And that kind of news just had to be shared with everyone. It wasn't the kind of news to wait until the next day. So, back they went back to Jerusalem.**

**Today, as Christians, we live with the same circumstances. Wait, preacher, whatever are you talking about? We did not meet Jesus on The Road to Emmaus. He's very real to us.**

**I understand your reticence. But think about this. As Christians, we have knowledge of Jesus' teachings. We know the stories found in the Gospels. It may not be as fresh to us as it was to Cleopas and his friend, but we do know the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus and we do have personal interactions with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.**

**Jesus knew that as history rolled forward, humankind has a tendency to put distance between ourselves and the past. Because of that, He gave us a community table of remembrance. A time when we can gather together as a church and partake of the bread and the wine.**

**Think about the illustration that Christ gives to us by dropping His disguise before Cleopas and his friend as he broke the bread. Each and every week we have the opportunity to reflect on where we have seen Jesus working in our lives and the lives around us when we partake of the elements of the table. Just as the two men invited Jesus to the table, we can invite people to the table of Jesus**

**here. We can find Jesus in the faces of people around us and in the actions all of us take to help others.**

**That is how we see Jesus. That is how He can minister to us and the people around us. And knowing this, we should never hesitate to turn around and go back to let everyone know how much Jesus has changed our lives, how His presence through the Holy Spirit moves through us to make the world a better place.**

**When people encounter us, there should be no question that we believe that Jesus is alive and working through us.**

**God bless you all,**

**AMEN**

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