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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
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Luke 24:13-35  
"The Unseen Guest"

In this amazing story, the resurrected Jesus joins the disciples on the road and they walk and talk together but Jesus is not recognized.

Was it because the disciples were downcast and did not really look at Jesus? Did their sadness and grief blind them? In another resurrection appearance story, Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener. Only when he utters her name does she recognize him.

The hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus burn within them when the stranger speaks to them and it is only when the stranger lifts up the bread and breaks it that they see him as Jesus.

It's a mystery. The best we can make of this and Mary's story is that the resurrected Jesus joins us when we search for him as Mary did and when we deeply reflect on him as the Emmaus disciples did. He is "the unseen guest."

We encounter him as an unseen guest from beginning to end in worship and in every focused endeavor in the church.

The Emmaus story also locates Jesus as the unseen guest beyond the walls of the church. He is encountered and experienced in every walk of life. The Emmaus road is every road: steep, narrow, wide, easy or difficult. Jesus accompanies us on these roads of life and he does so with words of inspiration, insight, comfort, encouragement and challenge.

One recent road was the aisle 10 days ago in Westminster Abby, London. It took four minutes to walk down the aisle and one couldn't help thinking that Jesus was the unseen guest with William and Kate as they walked down the red-carpeted pathway at the end of the wedding ceremony.

Every aspect of the wedding service invoked the presence of Jesus and most significantly (besides the music) for me was the sermon, called "the address," given by the Bishop of London, the Right Reverend Richard Chartres.

It occurred to me that every sermon brings Jesus Christ's presence into the gathered community and in the case of weddings into the congregation and especially to the couple sharing their vows. Jesus as unseen guest was palpably present on that day.

The bishop's sermon was an abridged version of the one posted online. For those who did not hear the sermon and for those who did not read it online and for those who would like to hear it again I decided to bring it to you today.

I hope our hearts burn within us during my speaking of the sermon. While it is addressed to Kate and William and to the congregation at Westminster Abby let us hear the words as spoken to us. My version will be fuller than the one given at the wedding but slightly shorter than that posted online.

Just as we read how Jesus as an unseen guest was present on the road to Emmaus let us hear how he was present 10 days ago in Westminster Abby and how he is now present to us. The address:

*"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."*

So said St Catherine of Siena whose festival day this is. Marriage is intended to be a way in which man and woman help each other to become what God meant each one to be, their deepest and truest selves.

Many are full of fear for the future of today's world but the message of the celebrations in this country and far beyond its shores is the right one – this is a joyful day! It is good that people in every continent are able to share in the celebrations because this is, as every wedding day should be, a day of hope.

In a sense every wedding is a royal wedding with the bride and groom as king and queen of creation, making a new life together so that life can flow through them to the future.

William and Catherine, you have chosen to be married in the sight of a generous God who so loved the world that he gave himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the Spirit of this generous God, husband and wife are to give themselves to one another.

Spiritual life grows as love finds its centre beyond ourselves. Faithful and committed relationships offer a door into the mystery of spiritual life in which we discover that the more we give of self, the richer we become in soul; the more we go beyond ourselves in love, the more we become our true selves and our spiritual beauty is more fully revealed. In marriage we are seeking to bring one another into fuller life.

It is of course hard to wean ourselves away from self-centredness. People can dream of such a thing but the hope will not be fulfilled without a solemn decision that, whatever the difficulties, we are committed to the way of generous love.

You have both made your decision today – "I will" – and by making this new relationship, you have aligned yourselves with what we believe is the way in which life is spiritually evolving, and which will lead to a creative future for the human race.

We stand looking forward to a century which is full of promise and full of peril. Human beings are confronting the question of how to use wisely the power which has been given to us through the discoveries of the last century. We shall not be converted to the

promise of the future by more knowledge, but rather by an increase of loving wisdom and reverence, for life, for the earth and for one another.

Marriage should transform, as husband and wife make one another their work of art. This transformation is possible as long as we do not harbour ambitions to reform our partner. There must be no coercion if the Spirit is to flow; each must give the other space and freedom.

As the reality of God has faded from so many lives in the West, there has been a corresponding inflation of expectations that personal relations alone will supply meaning and happiness in life. This is to load our partner with too great a burden. We are all incomplete: we all need the love which is secure, rather than oppressive, and mutual forgiveness, to thrive.

As we move towards our partner in love, following the example of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is quickened within us and can increasingly fill our lives with light. This leads to a family life which offers the best conditions in which the next generation can practice and exchange those gifts which can overcome fear and division and incubate the coming world of the Spirit, whose fruits are love and joy and peace.

I pray that every one present and the many millions watching this ceremony and sharing in your joy today will do everything in their power to support and uphold you in your new life. I pray that God will bless you in the way of life you have chosen, a way which is expressed in the prayer that you have written together in preparation for this day:

“God our Father, we thank you for our families; for the love that we share and for the joy of our marriage.

“In the busyness of each day keep our eyes fixed on what is real and important in life and help us to be generous with our time and love and energy.

“Strengthened by our union help us to serve and comfort those who suffer.

We ask this in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Jesus Christ as unseen guest joins us in our journeys. May we know and feel his presence and share the good news of his resurrection with those outside these walls.  
Amen.