dawns on the two of them who he is. But before they know it, he is gone. It is only then that Cleopas and his companion remember how they felt along the road, as the stranger taught them… “Like our hearts were on fire!” (24:32). They rush back to Jerusalem, only to discover that through some inexplicable resurrection power, the stranger appeared there, too.

The dramatic heart of this story is, of course, the moment of recognition: “and their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (24:31). In that instant, as Jesus stands there, the two halves of broken loaf balanced on his upturned palms, he becomes well-known to them.

There is another place in the New Testament where that Greek word, *epiginosko*, occurs. It is in 1st Corinthians 13, the famous “hymn to love.” Verse 12 says: “then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” We might translate the line literally, “then I will know well, even as I have been well-known.” Being well-known is not about fame. Being well-known is about recognition, the moment you look into the eyes of another and see not just a reflection of yourself but see your neighbor’s immortal soul.

In a beloved soliloquy from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet holds up the skull of a long-deceased friend. Hamlet muses: “Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him well, Horatio.” When Hamlet says of the court jester, Yorick, “I knew him well,” he captures the depth of knowing that transcends mere acquaintance. Hamlet’s monologue is poignant because the jester Yorick was a man the troubled prince deeply loved and admired.

One of the most dreaded fears in life is the prospect of no longer being well-known. We forge strong bonds with family and friends, those who know us well; but, over time, we will lose some of those dear ones. When there is no one left who can nod with recognition at the same stories or hum along with the same tunes, then indeed there is a loss of deep knowing. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul reassures us that because God’s love in Christ is eternal, we will continue, in life or in death, to be beloved of God, to be well-known in that deepest sense.

So, the question becomes: how can we be certain that Christ will recognize *us*? Matthew 25 offers us an answer, not an easy answer, but an answer. This passage leads us to take a long, hard look at the type of life we are living. It is Jesus’ parable of the last judgment, when the eternal judge separates the sheep from the goats. The disciples ask, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?” (25:37). Jesus replies, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (25:40). Jesus promises to recognize us, to treat us as belonging to him, if we first know and aid to the needy in our midst. If you know *them* well, Jesus says, then I promise to know *you*well.

According to Luke, these two disciples on the Emmaus Road come to know Jesus in two ways. The first is as the three of them are walking down the road together, discussing the Scriptures. The recognition is still not total, but evidently something is beginning to stir within them as they talk with this stranger about God’s word. “Did not our hearts burn within us…?”, they ask. The second way they come to know Jesus is as he breaks the bread. These two things, Word and Sacrament, must be present for Cleopas and his companion to know Jesus, and for him to deeply know them in return.

These are the two essential “marks of the church” (proof of the church’s true existence) according to the Protestant Reformers. Wherever you have the Word truly proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered, writes John Calvin, there you find the true church of Jesus Christ. As it was in the tiny village of Emmaus and in Calvin’s Geneva, so it is also true in Fergus Falls, MN, or wherever you are: when we open God’s Word together and study it, and when we gather at the Lord’s table to break bread, Christ is sure to be present with us.

There is a well-known story about the funeral of Charlemagne, Holy Roman Emperor, and ruler of the Frankish people in the early Middle Ages. Not since the fall of Rome had one king unified so much of western Europe under his rule. Charlemagne governed most of present-day France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy. When this well-known emperor died, soldiers bore his casket in a mighty procession from his castle to the great cathedral at Aix (France). There, the procession met the local bishop who physically barred the cathedral door with his body.

“Who comes?” the bishop demanded, according to ancient custom. “Charlemagne, Lord and King of the Holy Roman Empire,” proclaimed the emperor’s herald. “Him I know not,” the bishop replied.

He asked again: “Who comes?” The herald, a bit shaken, replied, “Charles the Great, a good and honest man of the earth.” “Him I know not,” the bishop said again.

“Who comes?” Trying a third time, the herald responded, “Charles, a lowly sinner, who begs the gift of Christ.” To which the bishop, Christ’s representative on earth, responded, “Enter! Receive Christ’s gift of life!” Charlemagne, during his life, was certainly well-known, but in death the only knowing that truly mattered was if he was known by Jesus Christ.

There is one last aspect of the Emmaus story to consider. As Jesus and the disciples complete their walk, Jesus makes as if to continue travelling. “But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So, he went in to stay with them” (24:29). “Stay with us” is the prayer of those two disciples who do not yet fully recognize their traveling companion, although perhaps a subconscious awareness is growing. “Stay with us” is so often the prayer we want to pray to Jesus. We want him to stay, here, with us, on familiar turf, where we can domesticate him and control his every move. But that is not the prayer we ought to pray because Jesus never stays for long. Yes, he is present in our lives in the broader sense, but he is always on the move.

Our desire to experience Jesus in a well-known space, like our sanctuary, echoes the disciples’ plea, “Stay with us.” Maybe the Lord’s message to us is that he refuses to dwell in the sanctuary permanently, any more than he accepted the invitation of the good residents of Emmaus to stay with them. Jesus has other roads to walk, other people he must meet, other places he must be. If Matthew 25 is any guide, those other places are wherever human griefs and hungers are most evident.

When we gather as God’s people, and we delve deeply into God’s Word and “our hearts burn within us,” and we break bread together and our eyes are opened, we recognize Jesus. But how much more astonishing and remarkable and transforming it is to know that when we love the people Jesus loves, then we are well-known to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us for not believing in the power available to us in your Holy Spirit. Thank you, Jesus, for pouring the Spirit out on us when we give our lives to you. We ask that you open our eyes and our hearts to see and believe that this promised source of power to witness to your work is available to us today. Help us to see and hear and help those we can. Help us to know them well, so we may be well-known by you. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Source: “Receive Christ’s Gift of Life.’ <https://blogs.bible.org/receive-christs-gift-of-life/> Posted December 24, 2019. Retrieved April 19, 2023.

**Well-Known Christians**

Sunday, April 23, 2023 [Luke 24:13-35](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24%3a13-35&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

“Who’s the most well-known Christian in the world today?” Not so many years ago, we might have said Martin Luther King, Jr. or Billy Graham or Mother Theresa or Robert Schuller (of Crystal Cathedral fame) were the most well-known Christians. Nowadays the list of well-known Christians might include Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, Bishop T. D. Jakes, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, or Pope Francis. These are well-known Christians in that their names are known far and wide.

Yet, there is another meaning of the phrase “well-known,” a meaning that refers not to breadth of knowledge, but depth. This way of being well-known is not limited to religious celebrities; it is available to any honest seekers who open their hearts to a living relationship with Jesus Christ. In this sense, being well-known is not about the number of people who know *us*, but how deeply *we are known* by our Lord.

Luke tells us how, as Jesus broke bread in the presence of two hungry travelers, “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” The word “recognized” (Greek, *epiginosko*) can also be translated “well-known.” With that translation, this verse says that once their eyes are opened, *they know Jesus well*. Jesus knows those weary wanderers on the Emmaus Road before they know him. What a dramatic moment it is when their eyes are opened and they recognize him! Then, just as quickly, Jesus vanishes from their sight.

We know that one of the travelers was Cleopas. The second traveler is anonymous. Some speculate that this other disciple may be Cleopas’ wife, although no one can say for certain. Luke says the two are walking to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. A stranger catches up with them. They walk on for a bit, and eventually small talk becomes big talk. They discuss Jesus, who died, but who is reputed to be raised from the dead. This stranger teaches them from the Hebrew Scriptures, in much the same way their teacher Jesus did, but they still do not recognize him.

When they reach Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion ask their new friend to stay and join them for dinner. He seems to be in a hurry to get someplace else, but then, abruptly, he agrees, and goes home with them. Just as the stranger is breaking bread, it suddenly