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Our ability to see things more clearly has dramatically changed through the centuries, and although telescopes help us see more clearly the heavens above, it's a bit fuzzy on the origins of the first telescope. Lens-like objects have been around for 4000 years, though no one is sure whether people used them to look into the heavens or if they were used as decorative glass.

The spectacle maker Hans Lippershey applied for the first patent for a telescope in 1608 in the Netherlands, which he described as a help "for seeing things far away as if they were nearby." Another story claims that someone else invented the telescope 18 years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Seeing the origin of the telescope is a bit fuzzy.

Over the past 400 years, we have gone from a magnification of 3x with that first patented telescope to 1400x with the Hubble Telescope to even better clarity with the new James Webb Telescope. Now we can peer back in time to the early formation of the universe, and even though we can see more clearly, we have come to realize that our understanding is still a bit fuzzy, for astronomers have seen massive, mature galaxies that shouldn't be there in the

beginning. They thought that the farther back in time we looked, that we would see young galaxies in early formation, so astronomers are stumped on the presence of these larger galaxies in the beginning.<sup>2</sup>

Even when we can see more clearly, sometimes our understanding may still be fuzzy, which is what two people discovered after Jesus died. Luke's story begins, "Now on that same day (of resurrection) two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem." As we gaze back in time at this story, our understanding may also seem a bit fuzzy. For one thing, no one knows the location of the city of Emmaus. For another, we don't know much about these two travelers, with a fuzzy reference of "two of them," one named Cleopas and the other never identified. Some suggest that since they end up at their house together at the end of the story, that the unnamed traveler could be Cleopas's wife.

These two encountered a third traveler, who the narrator tells us was Jesus, but we're also told "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." That's understandable, for they heard that Jesus had been killed. They weren't expecting to see him along that road. It's like those times I meet someone who says

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with enthusiasm, “Hey, Doug, how are you doing?” We may chat for a few minutes, and later I realize I had no idea who I was speaking with. It’s as though my eyes could not see the identity of the person until someone later mentions their name, and then my eyes are opened and I recognize who I had been speaking with.

In the case of the two travelers, they told how they heard that Jesus had been crucified, and how some women told the surprising news that they had seen a vision of angels who said Jesus was alive.

Jesus then referred to scriptures that indicated the Messiah would suffer, but even with this hint, the two travelers did not recognize Jesus. Although they remained fuzzy about his identity, they invited this mysterious man to their home.

The story continues with more mystery: “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.” Do you recognize those four verbs: took, blessed, broke, gave? Where else do we hear them spoken?

At the Table, each week for communion, words that echo the Last Supper Jesus had with his twelve disciples. At that meal, he took the bread, blessed it,

broke it, and gave it to them, inviting them to remember him each time they gathered at the Table.

As Jesus broke the bread with the travelers in Emmaus, “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” It was in the act of breaking the bread that Cleopas and his wife recognized Jesus. Their eyes were opened. They could see Jesus.

Their encounter ended, however, with another mysterious event: Jesus vanished from their sight. They could no longer see him, but they recalled their feelings, how their hearts had burned with passion as he talked with them along the road. They quickly went and told others about their experience.

In some ways, we’re a bit like those two travelers. We may find ourselves excited when hearing the stories of Jesus, especially the news of his life at Easter, but we may not always see him among us. When we do catch a glimpse of Jesus, he seems to vanish from among us. Maybe that’s why gathering at the Table has become such an important event for us, for in the breaking of the bread each Sunday, we see again and experience the risen Christ among us.

Back in the sixteenth century church, communion was served maybe four times a year, but reformer

John Calvin urged that it be served every Sunday. He described communion as

“a spiritual mystery, which cannot be seen by the eye, nor comprehended by the human understanding,” yet in the bread and the wine “we may say that Jesus Christ is there offered to us that we may possess Him.”<sup>3</sup>

At the Table we experience the mysterious presence of Christ, but when we leave this place, does our view of Jesus disappear, as when Jesus mysteriously left those two Emmaus travelers after breaking bread with them in their home?

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer would suggest that we continue to see Jesus throughout the week, for Bonhoeffer suggested that Jesus “comes in the form of the beggar, of the dissolute human child in ragged clothes, asking for help. He confronts you in every person that you meet. As long as there are people, Christ will walk the earth as your neighbor, as the one through whom God calls you, speaks to you, makes demands on you.”<sup>4</sup>

In a recent book entitled *Seeing Jesus*, the author Robert Hudson examined many stories of those throughout history who claimed to have seen Jesus—from the early stories in the Bible, to mystics, to contemporary experiences. He ends the book

with a story from the pandemic, when he meets a panhandler outside a café and cannot help but want to help him, partly because he has been thinking so much about what it means to see Christ.

After handing over a twenty-dollar bill, Hudson asks the man his name: Josh, he says as he walks away—the Anglicized form of Yeshua, the Hebrew name of Jesus. “The skeptic in me says, ‘How’d you know it was him?’” Hudson writes, in the last lines of the book. “The mystic in me says, ‘How do you know it wasn’t?’”<sup>5</sup>

This week, look around, even if you don’t have a telescope, even if your understanding or view seems a bit fuzzy. You might be surprised where you see Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_telescope](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_telescope)

<sup>2</sup> [https://finance.yahoo.com/news/james-webb-space-telescope-keeps-052552857.html?utm\\_source=pocket\\_saves&gucounter=1](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/james-webb-space-telescope-keeps-052552857.html?utm_source=pocket_saves&gucounter=1)

<sup>3</sup> Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship: Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Pentecost

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/what-it-means-to-see-jesus>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.