

Pilgrimage Bible study on Luke 24: 13-35 - "You'll Never Walk Alone",  
by Fernando Enns\*



**Fernando Enns** (photo A. Hillert – WCC)

**Luke 24:**

*13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” 19 He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” 25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 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. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road,*

*while he was opening the scriptures to us?” 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

On 23 August 2018, a great ecumenical event took place in Amsterdam, the city where the World Council of Churches was founded 70 years ago. Many international ecumenical guests came to celebrate the birthday of that “privileged instrument” of the ecumenical movement. A symposium was held in the university, a great service was celebrated in the Nieuwe Kerk in the city center, and guests were welcomed by the mayor of Amsterdam and local church representatives. And many Amsterdammers came to join the festivities. Everything was livestreamed and broadcast.

### **A “Walk of Peace” in the Streets of Amsterdam**

Still, for me personally, the most inspiring part of the event was the “Walk of Peace” that day. People young and old, local and international, from different ethnic and denominational backgrounds, joined this pilgrimage through the streets of Amsterdam. We stopped at different stations in order to learn about the challenges of injustice and violence in the midst of this wonderful and rich city, and how these places become “stations” of transformation. Among the many stations on our way: The place of former Jewish presence before the deportation by the occupiers from Nazi-Germany, and the monument erected by some Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who had been saved by courageous citizens of Amsterdam. Or the “Worldhouse” of the Protestant diaconal service, where refugees without papers find support and develop agency. Or the “Moses and Aaron Church,” which hosts the community of Sant’ Egidio – a movement within the Roman Catholic Church that centres around prayer, friendship with the poor, and peace. Then we visited a community formed by Muslims, Jews, and Christians who have committed themselves to stand together against any kind of discrimination that appears in the neighborhoods of Amsterdam. Further on stands the Armenian Orthodox Church with its memorial to the genocide. And the pastoral care for drug addicts in the middle of the red-light district—and many more stations.



All of these places and wonderful sites of transformation are so remarkable in themselves, witnesses to the gospel message of reconciliation. Yet what inspired me during this walk was the fact that we walked together and what that did to us! Strangers to each other at the beginning of the walk, we started talking to each other, listening together to the powerful messages of the representatives of the different stations of our little pilgrimage, becoming friends as we started to share our own personal stories of fear and concern, and encouraging each other by reaching out a hand to our fellow pilgrims. Never before had I realized the power of simply walking together on a “path of peace,” how it connects people in a very deep and meaningful way. No one should walk this pilgrimage alone! We shall not underestimate this unifying aspect during our seven-year “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, initiated by the WCC assembly in Busan (2013).

### **Becoming Friends on the Way – in the Presence of the Risen Christ**

The biblical story of the “Road to Emmaus” tells us about this important reality. With my two little nieces I often read a children’s book that contains wonderful and simple images and thereby stresses the aspect of friendship in this narrative. The two friends on the road (Cleopas and – the one without a name could be you or me) meet that “stranger,” who asks them crucial questions and then shares with them his perspective on what has happened during the past three days in Jerusalem. It becomes a conversation that they later refer to as a “burning-heart experience.” Eventually, that stranger becomes a friend, and they invite him to stay with them – because they worry about him. At this moment they do not know that it is Jesus to whom they are offering their hospitality. It is only when that stranger takes the bread, says thanks, breaks it and begins to share it with those friends that “their eyes were opened” (v. 31). It is in this very moment on their pilgrimage that they recognize the presence of Jesus. Immediately they share their experience with each other, eager to tell the other “companions” (v. 24) in Jerusalem what they have “seen,” how they have seen, and what they have understood about the continuing presence of Christ.

Jesus’ death was not the end but a new beginning for these two friends – and it becomes a new beginning for all the other friends. The cross is one of the “stations” of God’s own pilgrimage with his/her creation. And God invites his/her friends to participate in that continuing pilgrimage by making himself present – in the “stranger,” in the breaking of the bread, wherever the companions are gathering, granting his peace. “While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’” (v.

36). With my two little nieces I usually close the reading of the children's book with that old song that I learned in Sunday School classes: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Now that this important aspect of emerging friendship during our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has become so evident to me – by literally walking the streets of Amsterdam -- I see more clearly in the text that the women who discovered the empty tomb did not walk alone, but together, as friends: "Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others..." (v. 10). Cleopas and his friend return to their "companions" in order to assemble them all. And it is here, in this assembly of friends, that the risen Jesus joins them all. Peter had been the only one so far, who tried to walk alone, tried to make sense of it all by himself, but could not (v. 12). It seems that you have to *walk*– and you have to walk *together!* – in order to discover, to "see" Jesus become a friend in the "stranger."

### **The Ecumenical Dimension – Sharing the Bread**

For this reason, it is so important to walk this Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as an ecumenical fellowship. The promise of that pilgrimage is to become friends along the way. For 70 years, ecumenical relations have been fostered by the World Council of Churches, a community that has committed itself "to stay together" (1948) in order to continue "to walk together" for justice and peace (2013). And many have become friends on this journey, across ethnic and cultural backgrounds, across formerly divided denominational barriers, across age barriers, across gender identities. And it is wonderful to be part of this global friendship, because no one walks alone.

This biblical passage contains one further challenge that still needs to be met: The eyes of the friends were opened and they recognized Jesus. "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them" (v. 30). This is a strong call to share the eucharist with each other as we continue our pilgrimage, so that our eyes might be opened and we might recognize the presence of Jesus Christ among us. "You'll never walk alone" because it is the risen Christ who walks with all his friends, and in fact with all of creation. This truth is experienced in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, because it is the Risen One who sets the table – for all, together.

Will a common eucharist among all friends of Jesus become yet another station in our pilgrimage?

### **Questions**

1. What is the meaning of friendship in your community?
2. What do you "see" with the help of your friends (something that you would be blind to when you remain by yourself)?

### **Action**

Organize a "Walk of Peace" in your own community and include all kinds of local "stations" for justice and peace.

### **Resources**

Gerry & The Pacemakers - You'll Never Walk Alone [Official Video], at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5\\_LQArLa0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5_LQArLa0)

70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the WCC in Amsterdam, at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDVSoGfMRHk>

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### **You'll Never Walk Alone**

*When you walk through a storm  
Hold your head up high  
And don't be afraid of the dark*

*At the end of a storm  
There's a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of a lark*

*Walk on through the wind  
Walk on through the rain  
Though your dreams be tossed and blown*

*Walk on, walk on  
With hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone*

*You'll never walk alone*

*Walk on, walk on  
With hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone*

*You'll never walk alone*

*Songwriter: Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rodgers. © Concord Music Publishing LLC*

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