

*Third Sunday of Easter- The Road to Emmaus*  
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Written by: Carol Pawlowski, GNSHA

*“April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire”*



Photo courtesy of Sage Friedman/Unsplash

Instead of the rosy fingers of dawn, T.S. Eliot ponders the twilight of “The Waste Land.” This twilight is between life and death, dreaming and awakening, a need to remember the days and a will to forget, a memory of death and a need to memorialize. The two disciples mentioned in today’s Gospel confronted their own wasteland in the death of Jesus. We confront a similar wasteland in quarantine.

“The Waste Land” was written in a time of upheaval and echoes current reality: The flu of 1918 killed millions as WWI ‘s sounds of groaning, moaning and agonized death in the sludge of trench warfare. Both events were characterized by a delirium that blended reality, memory, dreams and nightmares. Life began to look like death with haunted pale figures resembling ghosts. Terrorism was on the rise; there was also a loss of faith as clergymen struggled to explain the senseless horror of war and pandemic to their flock. People tried to come to terms with the world around them in various ways: an increase in secularism, the feeling that “God is Dead”, a rise in Evangelical churches, and Eastern religions. Many people just wanted to push the dead away and bury grief in normalcy, or with drugs and alcohol.

History doesn’t repeat, but it rhymes. In the 1918 flu, the physical presence of death was common. People could see the bodies, smell the corpses, and hear the cry to bring out your dead. We are in a disengaged, digital world with a horror all its own. Our suited up doctors and nurses look like astronauts. The patients are attached to machines beeping and blinking. Occasionally a code blue alarm goes off and the staff responds like paratroopers: suit up, shuffle to the door, jump right into the morass of suffering, and do it again, and again, and again. In one hospital, death becomes disintermediated as the overwhelmed staff stop holding the hand of the dying and place the “Hand of God”, a warm water filled hand shaped balloon, upon the dying person’s hands to usher them alone through the twilight and into the Christ. We huddle in pods or on Zoom. We see the violence on TV. Faith is fading for many. Many don’t trust institutions, not even the ones that should tell us the science behind the pandemic.

**We dwell in twilight.**

This is our road to Emmaus. Emmaus means hot springs where people used to bathe and heal. We crave the healing at Emmaus. Like the disciples, we are so close to events that we cannot recognize the Christ within. We remind ourselves, outside in a ruined Spring with jays fretting, that somehow the Christ is still here.

For us, the road to Emmaus to the Christ is through a *Via Negativa*, a way that honors the inexpressible, and lives in the unknowing. When the disciples reached Emmaus they found the resurrected Christ. In one version of this story, the Christ breathed upon them and said, “*Peace be with you.*” We are not performing a physical journey and we do not see the Christ physically. However, we can reach the healing springs of Emmaus and the peace of the Christ through the breath and contemplation. As Richard Rohr stated, “at inhalation, we take the spirit into material (ourselves); at exhalation, we return the spirit to matter.”

Through the Christ in us, we perform a Eucharistic sacrament. When we journey through the *Via Negativa*, we can arrive at the peace and healing that we long for in these times.

[Readings for the Third Sunday of Easter](#)