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Led gently, tenderly to know the risen lord

by Robert McAllister



"The Road to Emmaus" (circa 1897) by Fritz von Uhde (Newscom/akg-images)

Two disciples were making their way to a village named Emmaus. In the course of their lively exchange, Jesus approached and began to walk with them. They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:13-32).

Of all the Easter stories, Jesus, this is my favorite.

The scene is probably afternoon on the dusty road to Emmaus. There is no sunrise or morning dew or angel or earthquake or empty tomb. There is no running or shouting or weeping. There are just two men walking and talking. It is so simple and so beautiful, Jesus, it almost takes my breath away. My imagination can witness the event and I am there.

I don't handle excitement well. It unnerves me. Any big "to do" stirs all kinds of emotions, and you know I don't handle emotions well. With Alzheimer's, my feelings just go charging off in any direction they please. Unusual and unexpected events can make me angry or anxious or sad or frightened or even "crazy" (as I call it). My responses are completely unpredictable.

The scene at the tomb is too much for me to grasp and to hold onto. It is too "busy," too hectic, too unreal. There are strong emotions everywhere, and I want to run away. Someone in "dazzling garments" would frighten me. I have a hard time recognizing the people I know even when they are calm and relaxed and dressed in familiar clothing.

As always, I have questions. Why these two men, only one of whom is named? What was special about them to have so much time in your presence? You seemed to think you needed to reveal yourself to them in a gentle and careful manner. Why was that? Maybe Cleopas or his companion had a weak heart or possibly an illness like mine. It was so thoughtful to make them feel at ease and then bring them so tenderly to an awareness of their risen Lord.

My Easter wish is to walk quietly down a path, hand in hand with my husband, and have you join us for a time. Or even better, the three of us sit and just talk. It is difficult for me to converse with someone when I am walking. I understand another person better if we are face-to-face. It helps me focus on what is being said.

During the day I sometimes feel very comfortable talking to you as if you were in the room. If someone can hold a little gadget and talk to another person anywhere in the world, it is not difficult for me to envision you hearing me wherever I am.

Words are a great consolation. They are another form of touch, only they reach more deeply into me. I wish I could learn to hear your voice as some holy people do. Talking with my husband is a great blessing in my life. We often talk for two or three hours. We used to have lengthy conversations about life, about religion, about philosophy, about world events. I don't know much about any of those topics now. Mostly we talk about my illness and how it affects our life. Talking helps me understand better what is happening to me. My husband is kind and loving. He encourages me and tells me how brave I am and how I inspire him. We agree our life continues to be a good life because it is filled with our love for each other and with the blessings of physical well-being and our deep faith.

My greatest fear is dying and leaving him alone. He says if he dies first, I will not remember him, but if I die first, I will live on in his memory and in his heart. Come to think of it, that's how you live with us now.

[Doctors diagnosed Jane McAllister with Alzheimer's disease eight years ago. Jane wrote these reflections on living, dying and rising with Alzheimer's with her husband and caregiver, Robert. Jane passed away the Thursday after Ash Wednesday, shortly after these reflections began appearing in *NCR*.]

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