

The Road to Emmaus

A staged reading or play based on Luke 24

By Dorian Scott Cole

Jesus has been crucified and buried, and the apostles are completely distraught, disillusioned, totally discouraged, despairing, and have no direction to go in. Their road, their direction, their future, is dust. Mary tries to tell them that Jesus is alive, but their preconceptions about what Jesus represented to them blinds them to her words. They can't receive it. But as they tell a stranger along the way (Jesus in disguise), they present the message of Jesus to him, and then as the stranger explains why these events had to happen to Jesus, their hearts burn within them as his message resonates within them. They then realize that they were with Jesus, and go to tell the other disciples. It is the message, acceptance, and future with God's guidance that burns within them, not Jesus' physical presence (he was disguised). It is this message that they were commissioned to preach to all nations. It is a simple message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, but it is the transforming power in people's lives that leads to all the benefits among the people that the disciples saw.

The emphasis of this play is the transforming power and the effect in people's lives – the message – which is as alive, relevant, and powerful in today's contemporary setting as then, and worth taking to others.

The dusty road symbolizes a meaningless, purposeless life which goes nowhere.

The characters aren't well identified in the Bible (except Mary), and in this play are composites of Biblical characters.

Key concepts:

1. The transforming power of Christ's message.
2. Through him we gain:
 1. Forgiveness and reconciliation to God and each other
 2. The benefits of reconciliation, better relations with others, peace
3. This is the message (Good News, Evangel) that we carry to others.

As a staged reading this is presented with minimal props, minimal action, and lines may be read aloud. As a short play, minimal props are required.

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Props

Prop for making dust by stomping or kicking. (See the note at the end.)

Rocks or clumps of grass to hide the dust makers.

Scrim or other mechanism for making Jesus disappear.

Cast

Cleo

Tim

Mary

Traveler (Jesus)

Setting

A dusty road in a contemporary setting, with characters in their late 20s to early 30s.

Time: Present day, Biblical times, timeless.

Blocking

Characters enter from stage right to meet with characters on the stage. The road stretches across the stage, but the characters begin at one side and only make it to about mid-way during most of the physical action.

Costumes

Shirt with Velcro for buttons.

Today's casual contemporary attire - no other costumes are necessary.

Music

The prelude to the play could be the melody for the song *Dust In The Wind*. This song could be sung at one point in the play (marked in the play).

Playing time

Approximately 15 minutes.

ACT 1 (of 1)

CLEO AND TIM ARE SLOWLY WALKING THE ROAD, TALKING.

CLEO

(Despairing, angry)

I feel so bad I could tear my shirt.

(Rips his shirt down the middle)

TIM

Thank God for Velcro.

(Fastens his shirt.)

Yeah, I'm still living with my Mom. She would kill me for tearing up my clothes.

MARY HURRIES UP TO THEM, SHOUTING.

MARY

(Excitedly.)

Tim, Cleo! He's alive! He's alive!

CLEO

What?

MARY

He came to me. He's OK! Everything's OK!

TIM

(Placating)

Mary, please. I know he was your best friend – our best friend-

MARY

No, it's true. I went to his grave. The gravestone is moved and he's not there! I saw him – he's alive!

CLEO

The grave stone probably just settled and moved some. They do that.

MARY

(Insistent)

I'm telling you, his body is not there! He came to me.

TIM

It's a cruel hoax. Maybe it was an imposter – someone who looks like him. Was it dark?

MARY

It was him! It was really him!

CLEO TRIES TO EMBRACE HER TO COMFORT, BUT SHE RESISTS.

CLEO

You have to get control of yourself.

MARY IS STILL EXCITED AND NOT ABOUT TO CHANGE HER MIND.
TIM STOPS CLEO FROM TRYING TO COMFORT HER.

TIM

OK, I believe that you believe that you saw him. Just be prepared to be disappointed.

MARY BACKS AWAY, LEAVING THEM.

MARY

You'll see! I promise, you'll see.

CLEO

Poor woman – he meant so much to her.

TIM

To all of us. We gave up our lives for this man! Now our future is the same as the dust on this road.

TIM KICKS THE DUST.

We're just dust in the wind, going nowhere important.

(Option: sing the song "Dust in the Wind," and use the melody leading up to the play.)

CLEO

How could God do this to us? What a cruel trick!

TIM

We followed him for years. He was our spiritual leader.

CLEO

Our friend.

TIM

We devoted our entire lives to him.

CLEO

We learned so much about God from him, and about how to live... or so we thought. Was all that talk just as meaningless as this road dust?

ANOTHER TRAVELER COMES NEAR AND BEGINS TO LISTEN.

TIM

How could the government arrest him? How could God *let* the government arrest him?

CLEO

And the religious leaders, too, of all people! They called him a troublemaker. I can't believe that mock trial, and they made all kinds of false charges, like he was a common criminal.

TIM

(Complaining to the traveler.)

How could they execute someone who never hurt anyone. Now I ask you, is that justice? Where is the fairness in that? Where is God when it counts?

TRAVELER

It happens all the time. Prosecutors put their troubles on a scapegoat and make the public happy.

TIM

But he was our hope – the hope of all humanity. And they just snuffed out his life like he was nothing more than a bug!

CLEO

Hey, listen! This man performed miracles. We *know* he was the real deal. Miracle. Bingo! Here's the proof: Sent from God!

TRAVELER

I've seen magicians turn sticks into snakes. Big deal. There are some really good magicians.

THE TRAVELER STARTS TO MOVE ON. TIM HURRIES AFTER HIM.
HE STOPS.

TIM

No, this wasn't magic. But his greatest thing was that he helped people. It was the most amazing thing: he never judged anyone, he just helped anyone who came to him – they might have been soldiers, or politicians, rich or poor –

CLEO

(Grabs the man by the sleeve to make him listen.)

Or even thieves or lepers. He just... helped them.

TIM

He gave people hope. He even gave me hope!

TRAVELER

So he could have had a good career as a motivational speaker. Too bad his life was cut short.

CLEO

No! I mean, he was a great speaker, but he taught us how to live together in peace.

TRAVELER

Ah! Now I understand; he was a teacher. A Rabbi. Sorry, guys – it happens.

DISMISSIVELY STARTS TO WALK ON. HE STOPS AS TIM TALKS.

TIM

You're not getting this at all! He knew what people had done in their lives. He just knew. He knew how screwed up our lives are, but he helped anyway.

He knew how I couldn't get along with other people. He knew how we make enemies of others. He knew how people mistreat each other and steal from them in business. And he knew how these things keep you down and you can't respect yourself or keep friends or become a better person – they just destroy your life.

But he saw me underneath all these scabs and scars and crusty old layers. And he just reached out and lifted me up and showed me how to do be a better person.

CLEO

(Excited.)

And he gave us a picture of what a magnificent world it could be if we would just love each other and stop mistreating each other. It was so real we could taste it, the Kingdom of God here and now.

TIM

(Excitement fading. Back to reality.)

What a crock! He's dead. Dead, dead, DEAD.

TRAVELER

Does not God have a purpose? Could God have no purpose in this?

TIM

Purpose!? Are you nuts? Our hope is in the grave. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

TIM KICKS THE DUST.

TRAVELER

And did his message die with him? Was it all lies?

CLEO

(Anguished)

How *can* it be true?! How can I believe that anything so perverse could happen?

TRAVELER

"So I took the thirty silver coins and threw them into the poor box in God's Temple."
Recognize it?

CLEO

You're quoting Zechariah's prophecy of the betrayer who lost hope for his people. How fitting. Judas also betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver?

TIM

Betrayal is the least of it. He was falsely accused. Falsely taken to his death!

TIM SITS DOWN IN THE DUST AND FORLORNLY HOLDS HIS HEAD.

TRAVELER

Tell me, did Jesus say even a word in his own defense?

TIM

No, and that's something else that I don't understand.

TRAVELER

Isaiah foresaw this. He prophesied that: "He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn't say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered, he took it all in silence."

CLEO

If God foresaw it, why didn't he stop it? Was it some kind of cruel joke like the gods of Zeus do to their followers? He was deserted even by God! He cried out to God on the cross:

BOTH CLEO AND THE TRAVELER RECITE TOGETHER:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

TIM AND CLEO LOOK AT EACH OTHER IN AMAZEMENT AND THEN
BACK AT THE TRAVELER.

TIM

He quoted the psalms... the writer of the Psalms foreshadowed it.

CLEO

No, no, this can't be. This is crazy. We're talking about God here. All powerful. All knowing. Duh!

TRAVELER

Isaiah foretold this, saying prophetically, "But the fact is, it was our pains he carried— our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed."

TIM

That would be Barabbas, someone fighting for us, not this gentle man. This was a mistake. God would not take this pure and innocent man, a spiritual leader who meant so much to all of us, and –

TRAVELER

"He came to cleanse them, but he was stabbed in his friend's house. People were ashamed of prophets and struck them down. Strike my shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Only those who remain are mine." Again Zechariah foreshadowed it. And even you, Tim, did you not run away and hide in the crowd when they tried me?"

TIM

(Shocked.)

I - I was afraid.

TRAVELER

(Gently)

I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly. I sacrificed myself for you. The pattern is foreshadowed in history, and the prophets warned of this sacrifice. Didn't I tell you that I must leave you so that God's purpose could be fulfilled? And that I would send the spirit to guide you. But here you are in despair, believing neither the prophets nor me.

(Pause)

Will you believe in me?

TIM AND CLEO LOOK AT EACH OTHER, ASTONISHED, AND THEN
ASHAMED THEY TURN AWAY FROM HIM AND KNEEL, HEADS
DOWN. JESUS DISAPPEARS BEFORE ASKING:

Will you spread my message to everyone?

SLOWLY THEY TURN TOWARD JESUS, BUT HE IS GONE.
DISAPPOINTED, THEY SIT DOWN IN THE DUST.

CLEO

(Discouraged)

What are we to do? Why will he not stay with us?

PAUSE.

TIM

(Wistful, remembering.)

This ghost stirred my heart. It was like being with Jesus again: understanding the scriptures, feeling clean and free and understanding our purpose. I remembered why we began following him.

CLEO

He gives me such hope, and helps me overcome the things that hold me back. You know me; I was just a poor fisherman: lazy, drinking, fighting, embarrassing my family, throwing my life away. He knew what kind of person I was, but he just said, "Follow me."

TIM

I wanted to be rich and powerful, handling money. All these temptations and illusions in life that I thought were so important faded away when I started doing things to help others - things that are fulfilling. He knew I was a faithless coward, but he said, "Follow me."

CLEO

My relationships with others are much better now because I treat others better –

(Laughs)

I even have concern for my enemies! I know they are important, too. He just... brings peace.

TIM

He... transforms lives.

TIM JUMPS UP.

TIM

Yes, and this is Good News! Evange! This is huge. We can't keep this secret; we have to tell the others!

CLEO

That Jesus appeared to us? They won't believe us!

TIM

No, that Jesus transforms lives! We have to give Jesus' message to others. We have to tell all of God's creation!

Scriptures quoted (NIV)

Zechariah 11:13 "So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter."

Message Bible: "God told me, "Throw it in the poor box." This stingy wage was all they thought of me and my work! So I took the thirty silver coins and threw them into the poor box in God's Temple."

Ps.35:11 "...false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence."

Message Bible: "11-12 Hostile accusers appear out of nowhere, they stand up and badger me. They pay me back misery for mercy, leaving my soul empty."

Isaiah 53:7 "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

Message Bible 7-9: "He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn't say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered and like a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence."

Ps.22:1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Message Bible: "God, God...my God! Why did you dump me miles from nowhere? Doubled up with pain, I call to God all the day long. No answer. Nothing. I keep at it all night, tossing and turning. "

Isa.53:4-5 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Message Bible: "But the fact is, it was our pains he carried— our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed."

Zec.13:7 smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Message Bible: 7-9 "Sword, get moving against my shepherd, against my close associate!" Decree of God-of-the-Angel-Armies. "Kill the shepherd! Scatter the sheep! The back of my hand against even the lambs! All across the country"—God's Decree—"two-thirds will be devastated and one-third survive. I'll deliver the surviving third to the refinery fires. I'll refine them as silver is refined, test them for purity as gold is tested. Then they'll pray to me by name and I'll answer them personally. I'll say, 'That's my people.' They'll say, 'God—my God!'"

Paraphrased Zec. 13: "He came to cleanse them, but he was stabbed in the house of his friends. People were ashamed of prophets and struck them down. Strike my shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Only those that remain are mine."

John 10:10 "I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly."

John 3:17 "For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Props

A scrim, with no light behind it, can be used to make Jesus disappear. Push it across by a stage hand or light guage wire or string.

The road setting does not require props, just empty space, and this can be conservative. A palm tree could be used, or other things, if conveniently available.

The dust clouds from stomping can be created by hiding cardboard ejectors behind rocks, clumps of grass, or other items. Fold the cardboard into a V shape, dump in some talcum powder, and lay the cardboard on its side behind the rock or grass. Stomping on the cardboard will eject the talcum powder in a cloud. **Caution:** If the powder falls on bare wood or other solid flooring, it will create a slick spot, but it is easy to clean up with a vacuum or broom.