



Road to Emmaus-Wanderin' Joe  
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It was late on a Friday night around my kitchen table, when a close friend wondered if he could ask me a religion question. He does not practice any religion, and from time to time likes to ask good and curious questions. He was not trying to offend, and was drawing on a vague and sparse Christian upbringing he has left behind, and asked,

“I am genuinely curious - What do you do with the zombie Jesus stories?”

First, we laughed, but then I did my best Friday night theology to explain how I interpret and approach the stories, like today's ...

The church is once again in this time and space in scripture where Easter has happened, and Jesus has these mysterious appearances.

And in these stories, Jesus is present and there, but the disciples, his closest friends, don't recognize him.

Mary thinks he's the gardener. The ones fishing don't recognize him on the shore. And in today's story—the road to Emmaus—two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem. And that matters. Because Jerusalem is where everything just fell apart. Their hope was there. Their teacher was there. Everything they thought God was doing... was there. And now? It's over. Or at least... they think it is.

So they're not just taking a walk. They're leaving. Leaving with disappointment. Leaving with confusion. Leaving a story they thought they understood. And as they walk... Jesus comes alongside them. And they don't recognize him. Something is different. Changed, .And — something is the same. Because eventually they do recognize him. In the breaking of bread. In the calling of their name. In the moment something clicks. And suddenly—they see. Which makes me wonder— how often is God already present... already walking with us... already at work...and we just don't have eyes to see it yet? And you probably wouldn't say, “I saw Jesus. “But you might say—“Wow... God must be here.”

In this moment. In this person. In what just happened. It's hard to describe. But we know—somehow—God is still showing up in the world all the time and in our lives. And like the disciples in those post-resurrection stories, sometimes it takes us a while to recognize it.

But in the love, in the breaking of bread, in the community that forms—we begin to see it, And sometimes— those moments show up in ways we don't expect at all. Let me tell you about a cat in my neighborhood. His name is Joe— most of us call him *Wanderin' Joe*. And that name fits, because Joe doesn't really belong to just one place. He belongs... everywhere. He roams. He wanders through yards and sidewalks and front porches. He makes friends wherever he goes. And somehow—this is the part people can't quite explain—Joe has a way of showing up right when you need him. He's kind of a local celebrity, actually. He has his own Facebook page with over 2,000 followers—which is a wild sentence to say about a cat. And people don't just follow him... they tell stories. They post sightings. Encounters. Like, "You won't believe who showed up today..." Joe frequently visits the daycare center and the elementary school—Joe loves kids. He'll wander right onto the playground during recess, And he acts like he's part of the school staff. He even sneaks inside the elementary school, makes his way to the front office, and just... sits with the secretary at her desk like he's clocked in for the day. The school loves him so much they created a whole day in his honor.

### *Joe Day.*

I stopped by the school on that afternoon, and kids were walking past each other in the hallway saying,

"Happy Joe Day! "Like it was a holiday, Joe loves music too. He's shown up at a children's choir rehearsal— just wandered in and stayed. He's been spotted at a bluegrass jam session at the Lutheran church, like he's there for the set list. During the day, you can often find him down in the Walhalla Ravine, making his rounds. He'll walk right up to strangers, rub against their legs like you've known each other forever, just checking in .He keeps the deer in line. And enjoys sunny days in the ravine the best. Oh but Joe doesn't stop there He visits people's homes—meeting their cats, their dogs, their kids. He even crashed a wedding. Just... showed up. And not long ago, he appeared at a home where a family was gathered, scattering their grandmother's ashes. He laid in their grass nearby. People have started to honor him in their own ways. There are stickers around the neighborhood that say, Where do you go, wandering Joe? And this summer, the first ever Joe Fest will take place in July... yes, a full festival in the ravine all around the joy Joe brings and the community he makes. And our local knit graffiti artists stitched a piece that reads the Tolkien quote:

*"Not all who wander are lost."*

And that's the thing about Joe. He wanders. He shows up. He moves from place to place, person to person. But every night—he goes home. Back to the family who adopted him from the humane society back in 2017.He's not lost. He just... keeps going. And if you live in this neighborhood long enough, you start to wonder—not just *where* Joe goes...but how he always seems to arrive at just the right moment. Like somehow—you didn't know you needed him...until he was already there. He brings the community together. Republicans and Democrats all love Joe. Strangers on the side walk have become neighbors through their common admiration of Joe. Joe is making our community stronger, more loving, and more connected.

Could Joe be a post resurrection Jesus? I joke ....

I know the truest revelation of who God is, is through Jesus. And the clearest picture of Jesus is found in scripture. But the Spirit...The Spirit is wild and free. Still showing up. In ordinary and extraordinary ways in our world right now. God isn't done with us. God wants us to connect—to the divine, and to each other. Now—Joe is not Jesus. But...he might be helping me and many of his over 2,000 followers pay attention more. And maybe—resurrection doesn't just mean Jesus *was* raised. Maybe it also means life keeps breaking in---Right here.....Right now.

If you look back over your life—you might be able to name a few of those moments. And maybe you didn't recognize it then. But looking back...you wonder—was God already there? And I've started to notice this more because of Joe.

There was a day—not that long ago—I was sitting at the playground after school. Just a few minutes before that, I had been rushing...feeling overwhelmed...trying to get everything done. But then I was just... sitting there. In the sun Watching my kids—and other kids just be kids. Running and. Playing tag....Digging for bugs. A few kids came over and asked if I had snacks— which I always do— and then they ran off again. And I just sat there...watching life happen.

And it was full of joy. Discovery. Community. Love. And nothing about that moment should have felt meaningful. But it did. It made me stop. It made me grateful. It pulled me out of my own head. And I remember thinking—maybe this is how it works. Not always in big, life-changing ways...but in small interruptions of grace. Moments that say—“You're not alone. ”Pay attention. ”Life is still breaking in.”Maybe resurrection doesn't always arrive the way we expect. Maybe it shows up sideways....Quietly...Unexpectedly....Wandering right into the middle of our lives. Maybe the question is more than: “Do you believe in resurrection? “Maybe the question is also: “Are you paying attention to where resurrection already showing up? “Because it might be in a meal. In a moment. In a person. Or — Dare I say, in a wanderin' cat. Not all who wander are lost. Not all resurrection looks the way we expect.

So maybe the better question is:

Where is God already showing up... and will we recognize it?

Amen.