

## Introduction

# They Recognized Him

That's the point of the story of the two disciples, who on Easter Sunday did not believe the report of Jesus' resurrection. They were going home from Jerusalem to Emmaus, convinced that their hopes about the Messiah were dashed. A stranger came up to them, asked about their conversation, and shared stories from the Bible. They invited him into their home. He shifted from being the guest to being the host, broke the bread, and

*they recognized him.* The stranger was Jesus!

Other stories record a similar sudden recognition of God. Moses was tending his sheep and saw a bush that was burning. He turned aside from what he was doing and was addressed by a voice that said his name was *I AM*. God got his attention.

Jacob was running away. He slept and woke up and said, "*Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.*" He woke up spiritually.

Those experiences changed these people individually, changed their community, and in turn changed the world. God continues to take the initiative with us, giving us the opportunity to receive love, grace, communion. Many times we are blind like the disciples, wondering what do next. Sometimes we are like Moses, going about our business unaware of God. Sometimes, like Jacob, we are spiritually asleep.

Many of us are puzzled about what it means to recognize God, to be aware of God's presence. Our daily experience seems very different from the stories in the Bible. We don't usually hear a voice or suddenly awake with a sense of holiness. We haven't usually recognized Jesus as the host at our tables, in communion, or even in the generosity of life.

How can we recognize God, pay attention, wake up? Each of these experiences in the Bible stories is unique. Jesus didn't give the same word to the individuals he met. We, too, are unique in our spiritual awareness. Yet there are ways of learning together.

Here are some practices to increase our awareness, ways of paying attention that come from the Bible experience and from other historical patterns of recognizing God in peoples' lives.

### *About Me*

I have been surprised as I have recognized God many times as a person, pastor, and spiritual guide. I have put together three areas of experience that are usually learned separately, but are actually interrelated:

***Individual spiritual growth.*** I have practiced individual spiritual direction for twenty-five years, mostly with clergy.

***Changing the congregational culture.*** I was a pastor for forty years, and taught pastors in seminary, courses in conferences, and workshops. I have learned ways that individuals and the church's leaders and community discern where the Spirit is already working.

***Action in the world.*** I have discovered and practiced new ways of discerning mission to families, work, and in the world. This goes beyond recognizing and serving Jesus in the neighbor, the poor, and sick. It is more than working for justice. It is discerning, recognizing God with others in community as we let go of our previous ways of thinking and act to meet the challenge of profound change in the culture.