





As the stranger helps the two disciples to make sense of the past in a new light, they respond by inviting him to stay with them. When they go in to table they break bread together. The stranger gives himself away by giving himself away to them, in the bread. He is the risen Jesus, and he leaves them with hearts that burn and with eyes that see. Not only does he help them to reinterpret the past in the light of their new experience, he gives them a new future. They can now face Jerusalem even in the dark and they return there to share their story with the others.

They take the light of Easter Sunday back into the darkness of Good Friday, and that changes their memory. Only the risen Jesus makes sense of everything that went before. In his word and in the breaking of the bread, the past is brought up to date. The past is now reinterpreted in the light of the great truth that Jesus is Lord.

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist we too listen to the word of God and break bread together. Jesus comes among us, not as the stranger; rather, he comes to us in word and sacrament to give us new hope to face our future with him. Our own stories may not sound very different from that of the two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus. We are invited, however, to understand our stories in the forgiving and everlasting light of Jesus' resurrection.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Supper at Emmaus*

### A welcoming presence

If you visit the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam, you learn that Rembrandt lived in this house from 1639 until 1656, when he was declared bankrupt because he could not pay his debts. The house was in the centre of Amsterdam's Jewish community – composed mostly of Sephardic Jews who had fled Spain and Portugal during the time of the Inquisition. Rembrandt painted *Supper at Emmaus* in 1648 and broke with tradition by using a Jewish neighbour as his model for Jesus. In defiance of both anti-Semitism and the canonical tradition of portraying a European Jesus, Rembrandt portrays Jesus as a Jew.

Rembrandt was a student of the Bible and a Protestant: the established religion in his country was the Dutch Reformed Church. Strict Reformed theology banned images of Christ as idolatry. Rembrandt had many Lutheran, Catholic and Jewish clients and felt free to portray Jesus not only from his own lively interpretation of the Gospels but also in the light of his Jewish neighbours.

The upper part of the painting is stark and vacant; the light comes through a window in the upper left. Behind the figure of Jesus there is a monumental arch, carved from rough stone, which would not look out of place in a Romanesque basilica. The suggestion of a church apse leads the eye to interpret this table as an altar, a reading supported by the fact that the table is dressed with a heavy fringed fabric, a white cloth, reminiscent of the altar cloth and the white corporal which decorate the altar at Mass.

As Jesus breaks the *challah* bread – the Jewish braided loaf – the eyes of the two disciples are opened. The face of Christ is extraordinarily gentle, even vulnerable, as the divine radiates through his humanity, lighting up the praying hands of the disciple on the left. This is not the depiction of a distant majesty to be worshipped from afar, but the portrait of a humble host who invites us to join him at table. A dog dozes on the lower left, completing the domestic scene. We feel at home with this Jesus, at ease in his warm welcoming presence, eager to share the bread that is life.