

## E A S T E R 3, Apr. 30, 2017, Year A

- Here – *at the beginning*– I want to signal where I am headed with this. Our Gospel about the disciples on the road to Emmaus gives us insight about *your* ministry and *mine*. The Emmaus story tells us about *our ministry* as Baptized people, and as disciples within this church.
- The experience of the first disciples was not totally unique, for [we also see the Risen Jesus](#). *But*, we don't see him *in the same way* the first eleven did. Jesus found them [behind locked doors, unprepared](#) for the reality of his resurrection. [They needed to see his Risen presence physically. And they needed to see him in that way, so that we can see him now, in the way that we do.](#) Jesus also finds [us](#) behind locked doors: the 'locked doors of ourselves.' But he stands not so much *before* us as [within](#) us. [We encounter him within ourselves, and within others.](#) And we do so *for the same reasons* as did the hiding eleven disciples - that we may [receive his peace](#), and [be sent out on his mission](#). In a bit, I'll say more about this.
- [But here](#), I want to share with you one of my favorite scenes from [Walker Percy's last novel, The Thanatos Syndrome](#). It influenced how I came to love both Louisiana, *and* Walker Percy's writing. *Both* prepared me for an *unexpected* call to serve in that part of the world. *The Thanatos Syndrome* is set in the piney woods of the *culturally-rich, southern* part of the state, where Percy wrote, and in the parish where we last lived.
- The scene involves a local psychiatrist, [a complicated character called Dr. Tom More](#). Having been asked to see an unusual case, [Dr. More must climb to the top of a fire tower!](#) *Now, if you aren't familiar with them*, these towers are set up as observation posts, from which [a lookout](#) can identify a forest fire. We had a lookout tower in West Feliciana Parish, just up the road from our church and rectory. In Percy's novel, [the observer](#) at the tower's peak is [not](#) a Forest Service employee, but instead is a local parish priest! *That is odd enough*. But Percy alerts us to another fact ~ [this parish priest has](#), as

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we like to say, *gone off the deep end*. So, Tom More is asked to go up a hundred feet to the top of the fire tower, *to try to talk the priest down* from his lookout platform.

- This scene is all about *discernment*. *Discernment can be like trying to see through fog, from the bridge of a ship*. At the very least, you look for a lighthouse beacon, or listen for the sharp sound of another ship's bell. Discernment starts by observing *contrast*, with seeing sharper and harder edges through the swirling white mist. The central question for discernment is this: *what are we trying to see?*
- Responding to his challenge, Dr. More climbs the *many* sets of metal stairs leading to the tower's peak. Apprehensive about what he will find there, he pushes *up* the trap door on the tower's upper platform, and sees Fr. Smith. *At first, the doctor is surprised by his new patient*. For Fr. Smith's comments are *basically rational*. And yet... Dr. More senses a profound '*disconnect*.' *Perhaps the priest is just a modern day version of St. Simeon the Stylite*, who spent years living exposed on the top of a pillar, in spiritual protest at the world around him.
- *But here is the problem*: Fr. Smith can tell you the exact location of a forest fire, based on knowledge *important* for everyday life. *Yet, this priest who can describe such facts with apparent precision, has no clue* about *a more important location*. *He can tell you where a fire is; but he can't tell you where he is!* Do we see the problem here? It boils down to thinking we have the *whole world* figured out. *And yet*, we have no real grasp of where *we* are.
- *So... how do we locate ourselves?* This was Zaccheus's problem.<sup>1</sup> It became a stumbling block for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. *Uncomfortably*, it may be *our* challenge, as well. As daunting as *this 'location question'* can be, we nevertheless have *good news*. *We are precisely where we need to*

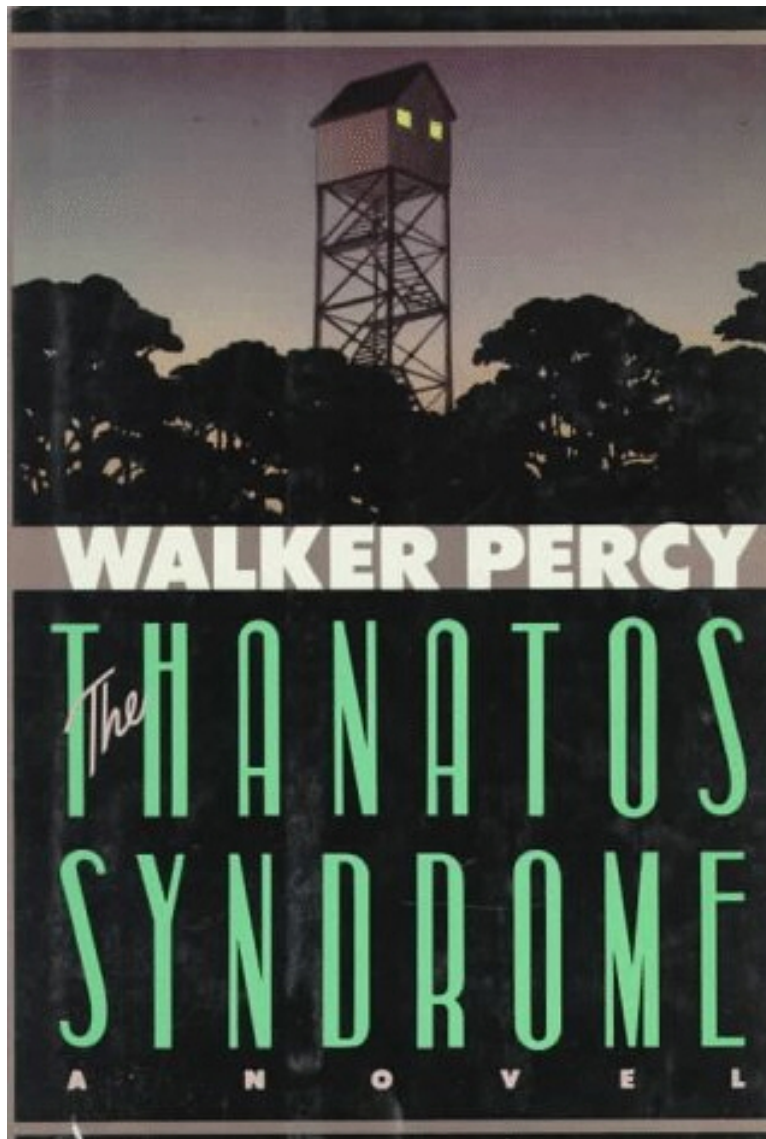
*be, in order to locate ourselves properly. We are here, in the company of the Baptized. With one another, we are growing into our new identity, as members of the Body of the Risen Christ.*

- We gather here so we can learn *the great story of the Bible*, and *how we fit into* that story as active participants. And, we are learning this story and about our part in it, *so that we can share it with others. This why we are here, becoming disciples, so that, in turn, we become apostles, as well.*
- *We are like those two on the road to Emmaus. For we are guided by the Risen Lord in coming to see the big picture, and how all the parts fit into it. He helped them to see how many things in the Hebrew Bible were about him. He also helped them see how they were part of that same big picture. By this, they came to perceive more about their role in the still-unfolding story of God's Redemption of Creation.*
- Here is the *really sad* thing about Percy's dislocated priest, up in the lookout tower: *he had become adept at pointing to and identifying something outside and beyond himself ~ the physical location of forest fires. And yet, a priest's vocation is to point to and identify something within, so that others can recognize the same spiritual thing within themselves.* This particular priest has climbed the stairs of what has become his own little *Tower of Babel*.<sup>2</sup> When *what he really needs* to do is see how *the Risen Jesus was and is the ladder of angels that Jacob saw in his vision.* It's *the very same spiritual ladder* about which Jesus tells Nathaniel, at the beginning of John's Gospel.<sup>3</sup>
- *This is a ladder of communion and communication. It connects the realm of God's fullness, with the realm of our incompleteness. We find the ladder within ~ for this is where it now is.* Through his resurrection, and our Baptism into it, the Risen Lord is now *within us*. He now connects us with every other

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*person in him*, with whom we share communion. *We can now see, identify, and point to, the Risen Jesus within ourselves and in each other. But, we also learn how to tell others* about the great story of the Bible, and about our part in it. This role of telling others is not limited to *missionaries* overseas, or to *clergy* who serve in our churches. *This sharing role includes and involves every one of us.*

- In one way or another, *we all find ourselves on the road to Emmaus*. Like the first disciples, *we do not walk this 'Emmaus Way' alone*. Sometimes, perhaps even *often*, our fellow traveler may at first be *unseen*, and then may be *unrecognized* after appearing to us. But, to our surprise and delight, *he discloses himself*, just as he did to those first disciples. *He does this in the breaking of bread. We share their wonder*. For like them, we can describe *how our hearts have burned within us*, while on our Way. To us, as he did with them, the Risen One continues to open the Scriptures, *so that we may behold him in all his redeeming work*.



The front cover of the First Edition of Walker Percy's novel,  
*The Thanatos Syndrome*

**Luke 24:13-35**

Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.**

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "**Stay with us**, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. **When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him**; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "**Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?**" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Luke 19:1-10.

<sup>2</sup> An image from the famous story recorded in Genesis 11:1-9.

<sup>3</sup> See John 1:43-51, based on Genesis 28:10-22.