When I was in high school two friends of mine were in a car crash. It was a relatively minor rear-end collision that did more to damage the car than the driver and the passenger. What I remember though is that one woman, the driver, saw the car coming in the rearview mirror and tensed up. The other woman, in the passenger seat, was oblivious to the impending danger. That woman was hardly sore after the crash, but the first woman was stoved up badly for a while. She reported that the doctors told her it was at least partially because she had clenched down her body so tightly when she saw the other car coming. What was supposed to be a protective move, she was told, actually caused her more harm.

I haven’t been always able to live it out fully but the wisdom of that instance has stuck with me. It’s a natural human inclination it seems to me, to prepare for disaster by clenching down protectively, but it seems that’s an approach that often backfires.

Brené Brown, a well-known researcher on shame and vulnerability, encourages readers not to clench down or puff up when met with a threat.¹ Those responses, her studies show, prove less helpful in the long run than bravely, vulnerably standing our ground whenever we can. A number of factors can hinder our ability to do that and it may not be the best decision for one of us at a given time. But when we can take a breath, stay vulnerable, honest, and calm, we can sometimes see possibilities that were invisible to us before. Those possibilities may indeed look like miracles from our standpoint.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were not ready to see the miracle of the risen Christ standing right before them. Maybe they were still too upset. I think I would be too, if I had been through any of the sad and scary things they had just experienced. It’s not

¹ See Brown’s researched wisdom on this matter and others in her books and talks, ie. Daring Greatly.
for the readers’ sake that Cleopas rehearses the whole story about Jesus to Jesus. I think it’s written there to show us just how upset and bent out of shape Cleopas really was. He didn’t even know who he was talking to! I love this question he asks Jesus: “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” As readers two thousand years later, we can chuckle. But how often is the joke on us? How often is it we too miss the miracles right in front of us?

One thing I like about this story is that Jesus stayed with them. He walked all the way to Emmaus with them even though they didn’t recognize him the whole time. He just stayed with them, patiently, for the most part. I’d like to believe that Jesus stays with us too--even when we don’t realize it.

That old footsteps poem covers some worn territory by now. You likely know the one. A person looks back over their life’s journey as though it were footprints in the sand. There are two sets of footprints most of the time. When asked, Jesus says, the second set of footprints is me walking beside you. But there are also places where there is only a single set of footprints. When asked about those places, Jesus responds, “The Sand People ride single file to hide their numbers.” Okay, so that’s not how the poem goes. That’s a Star Wars reference.

Ya know, I’ve spent some time in these Covid-caused worship videos, encouraging us to take time to be present to our fears and anxieties--to really feel all the feels. I still think that’s good, but I also thought maybe it was time to say it’s okay to take a break from them too! It’s okay to laugh when you can. It’s okay to relax when you can. It’s okay if the sunshine starts breaking through the clouds. That might take awhile, but it’s okay when it does. It’s okay to stop for the night, find some dinner, and invite the risen Christ to join you.

One of the things I like most about this story is that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. It wasn’t in the majestic wonder of the Milky Way. It wasn’t some grand
fireworks he conjured up for them. No, it was in the simple, everyday task of breaking bread in which they recognized the risen Christ, miraculously right there with them. He told them this is what they could do to remember their unbreakable connection to him, to each other, and to all the Earth. It’s an act the church still carries out to this day in so many varying practices of communion. We take the bread, bless it, break it, and share it with each other in remembrance of the one we call Jesus Christ and all the sacred, life-saving, truth he revealed to us.

Even though things may get scary and reasons for sadness will arise, we don’t have to clench ourselves down--or even be perfect at relaxing. We don’t have to be perfect or powerful. We don’t have to feel any one way or do it in any certain time.

If we want to recognize the risen Christ one thing we can do is practice paying attention to the simple, everyday miracles in our everyday lives. Breaking bread, cooking rice, folding laundry, stepping out onto the sidewalk, feeling the cool spring rain, or taking a single breath are all opportunities to recognize the miracle of our connection. There are countless opportunities to pause long enough to give ourselves a chance to recognize our miraculous connection to the holy creator of the universe, to all other human beings and living creatures, and to this very Earth, our home.

I pray these days that no matter where we are, we may all give ourselves opportunities to recognize the miracles right before us. I pray we may all find our own way and our time to recognize the risen Christ, right here with us, in the breaking of the bread.

May it be so. Amen.