

The Third Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2023

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

Company on Life's Journey

Luke 24:13–35

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

From today's Gospel reading: **The two disciples who had walked the road to Emmaus rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread** (vv 33–35).

Two men walked the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were disciples of Jesus. Like all of Jesus' disciples, like you, they followed Him. They followed His teachings, certainly, but these guys also followed Him with their feet! One week earlier, after a couple of years of following Him, they'd literally walked behind their Lord into Jerusalem on a path of palm branches and coats. Then that journey had come to a sudden and unexpected end. In the span of a single day, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. The path they'd followed led, well, it led to a tomb. To a tomb! That wasn't where they expected to go—not at all!—but it's where Jesus had gone. So following Jesus appeared to lead to a dead end. They lost the way. They had no direction. Life went on, yes, but the journey with Jesus was clearly over.

Or was it? These two disciples had a lot to talk about while they walked to Emmaus. It was Sunday afternoon, the first day of the week, the third day since Jesus' crucifixion. Earlier that morning some women had gone to the tomb and found it empty. They claimed to have seen angels who said that Jesus had risen and was among the living, not the dead. What a story! Why, even the apostles, however, thought this was an "**idle tale.**" They "**didn't believe them**" (Lk 24:11). Peter looked into for himself. He found the tomb empty, but he didn't see the angels. So he returned home "**marveling at what had happened**" (Lk 24:12). It was all very confusing. The two disciples had no idea what it all meant, but it gave them plenty to discuss while they walked.

Now they were in the middle of that discussion—puzzling out what they had seen and heard—when a third person joined them and became their companion on the way. **Jesus Himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from**

recognizing Him (vv 15–16). They had no idea who this stranger was. They were shocked by how little He seemed to know about what had happened in Jerusalem over the past week. Here was a golden opportunity to confess their faith and to tell someone else about Jesus, and they did—sort of! Cleopas explained that they were talking about **“Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people”** (v 19). He told about the arrest, the trials, the crucifixion, and even what they knew of the Easter story. But, he said, **“We had hoped that [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel”** (v 21). We hoped! But no longer. Jesus hadn’t delivered what they had hoped for. The cross was a major disappointment, as crosses usually are, no matter what form they take. They couldn’t see how Jesus’ death and burial could do them any good. The thought that it lead nowhere. A dead end.

Perhaps this story sounds familiar. Having been baptized and taught the faith, you too are disciples of Jesus. And you’re on a journey as well, not from Jerusalem to Emmaus but from baptism, through the life of faith, finally to death with Jesus. It’s not an easy journey. Like those disciples, you’ve heard that the tomb is empty. You’ve heard that Jesus lives. But it can be hard to believe. You don’t see Jesus with your own eyes—not yet. And it’s not always clear where He may be leading you or what He’s doing with you. Being and remaining a Christian can be a challenge. In some ways it seems more difficult for our children and grandchildren than it was for us or our parents or grandparents. We’re headed into a time when we Christians may have less freedom to believe and live our faith. We may be mocked or treated poorly for following Jesus. We may even suffer persecution. Do you remember the questions asked at confirmation? They didn’t shy away from the challenge: Do you intend to remain disciples, “even to death”? Are you willing to “suffer all” for being a Christian?

There may be times when your Lord seems like a disappointment to you. You may even think that He’s failed you or abandoned you. Life with Jesus may not turn out exactly like you expect or hope. Perhaps a family member or friend suffers a terrible illness or dies. Maybe you don’t get the job that you’ve been looking for or you lose the one you had. Or the plans you made for yourself—your education, family life, retirement—don’t happen quite the way you wanted. At such times, you may be tempted to think that Jesus’ crucifixion and empty tomb is weak and powerless. And, just like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, you might find yourself having conversations with others not only about who Jesus is but even about your frustration and disappointment with him.

So how does Jesus respond to those two disciple? How does He react to their disappointment and sorrow? **He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should**

suffer these things and enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (vv 25–27). He took them back through the basics of the faith. He knew their doubt and unbelief. He knew their hearts were weighed down by their sin and separation from God. We struggle to hold on to the promises when crosses come. So they needed to hear it again and learn it again—to hear how those Scriptures, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, every page, are all about Jesus. And so do we. Once isn’t enough to carry you through life. There’s no such thing as a graduation from the Christian faith. So we continue to follow Jesus by holding His word sacred and by gladly hearing and learning it, even when frustrated and disappointed.

When those two disciples and Jesus reached the village, **He acted as if He were going farther, but they urged Him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So He went in to stay with them** (vv 28–29). Stay with us! Jesus heard that prayer and answered it. He joined them. He stayed with them. He even sat at the table with them. **When He was at table, He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And He vanished from their sight** (vv 30–31). At that meal, that supper, Jesus wasn’t the guest. He was the host. And there He opened their eyes to recognize Him. His journey didn’t end at the tomb. It continued with the resurrection! Alleluia! Christ is risen! **God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus who was crucified** (Acts 2:36). He remains with His disciples even when they don’t see Him. He remains with you as your faithful and true Lord. And so those two disciples continued to follow Jesus. They were born again not by perishable seed but by the imperishable seed of God’s word. And now that journey with Jesus would be through the Scriptures and the Supper.

What happened to them set a pattern that we continue to follow today. Jesus reveals Himself in His Word and Sacrament. This is repeated on the first day of every week as the Scriptures are read and preached and as the Lord’s Supper is received. We need what those disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus needed. We need crucified and risen Jesus with us on our journey. We need His Word. We need the bread that He breaks. And we have it. Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. He travels with us through life as our unseen guide. He makes Himself known to us here in the Divine Service. First, He uses the Word of God to preach Himself as the crucified and risen Lord to our foolish and slow-to-believe hearts. Then He hosts this meal in which He feeds us with His own body and blood. This is how He goes with us on the journey from baptism to death and leads us through death. This is how He meets our crosses, frustrations, and disappointments with His perfect love and mercy. This is how He leads us through death and the grave to the feast that never ends.

Dear Christian, you've got company on life's journey—the best company, a faithful guide and fearless leader—for your Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, goes with you!

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

*Revised from a sermon preached by Pastor Gregory on May 4, 2014,
at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*