

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Third Sunday of Easter - Year A
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
I Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35
04/23/2023

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

13Now on that same day [when Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene,] two [disciples] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18Then 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?" 19He 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, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But 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. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and 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. 24Some 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.” 25Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But 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. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They 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?” 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Blinded by Grief

Good morning! Where I grew up, most of the pastors had attended Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary (now a part of United Lutheran

Seminary). And so it made sense that it was at the top of my list when I began to consider a seminary that I wanted to attend. But, I went so far as to treat it as a given, Gettysburg WAS the seminary that I was going to go to after college. It just made sense. As college wrapped up, my pastor forced me to attend a visitation weekend at another seminary, and so I begrudgingly got on a plane to South Carolina to visit Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. And after arriving on campus, that's when things started to feel weird. There was something about the school that I really enjoyed... but that couldn't be the case... I was going to Gettysburg! Then, two or three weeks later when I attended Gettysburg for a similar visit I was VERY confused. Because although the people were wonderful and nice, I wasn't getting the warm and fuzzies. If I'm honest, within the first hour of being on Gettysburg's campus I was convinced that it, in fact, turns out I was going to Southern! This was certainly a surprise for me, my family, Megan, and my church. That feeling I couldn't describe when visiting Southern seminary was my level of uncomfortableness with being forced to see the world in a way I had never anticipated. And as we begin the third week of Easter, it's a reality the disciples were struggling with too.

And to give credit where credit is due, the thesis of this sermon came from our conversation on Monday in bible study and all credit is due to Norm Otto for that impetus.

Our text today is certainly one of my favorites in the Gospels, and has been an important one for Christians of all times and places. But just to make sure we can get the most from the story, let's set the stage. The story takes place Easter Day. This is something that is easy for us to forget. It's been three weeks for us, but for the disciples Jesus had just died three days ago. Our disciples, one who isn't named at all, and another, Cleopas, is only

named here in Luke. They find themselves on the road fleeing the Holy City, probably because they feared what might happen to them. It's here where we get what I can't confirm, but has always been an especially sarcastic response from the disciples when Jesus asks them what they're talking about: *"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"* And, *"The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But 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. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and 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. 24Some 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."*

The lines that always get me are in verse 17 when Jesus asks them what they're talking about: *"They stood still, looking sad."* These are two men clearly in the midst of grief. You hear all the hope and all the grief in verse 21. *"But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."* In just a few words, the writer conveys the hopes that had been crushed for these men.

But this story is about movement, both physically and emotionally. One scholar writes that the physical *"movement is by walking, slowly and hopelessly from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and then hastily and hopefully*

*form Emmaus to Jerusalem.*¹ But we also travel along with an emotional journey that begins with grief but moves wonderfully towards hope and belief. And it's here where the writer makes some interesting points. The first to note is that they don't recognize Jesus when he is teaching. It seems that belief isn't about how much we know about scripture, or how well versed we are in fancy church words. They are important, I mean Jesus spends the entire journey explaining things to them, but they aren't the MOST important.

It isn't until later that things become clear for them. And that happens in the meal. Now, if you remember one thing about the Gospel of Luke, this is probably a good one, the writer of Luke LOVES meals. And while it might be tempting to think of them as a foody, it's much deeper for this writer. Meals were often about grandstanding and showing off to who you owed fealty and respect too. But the meals in this gospel are about equality. They all eat together. And so it is in the breaking of the bread that the disciples see Jesus. The other interesting detail is that Jesus is known only AFTER they extend an invitation: *"28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But 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."* It's as if we're being told that God is most present and revealed when we show compassion and hospitality to those we don't know. One scholar writes *"It is in the presence of Christ at a table opened to a stranger which transforms an ordinary supper into the sacrament."*²

¹ Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 284-285.

² *Ibid.* p. 286.

Another scholar points out that *“the Emmaus story responds by showing that the presence of the Lord is known in experiences that transcend the events of the resurrection...”*³ It’s in those experiences of Jesus Christ that it all becomes clear.

Which brings the story around to us. The disciples had been so blinded by the grief of Jesus' death that they were unable to see the life of the resurrection. And so I ask you, what is the church grieving that is blinding us from seeing the new hope in Christ right in front of us? The disciples had very clear ideas about how the Messiah would act and behave, and we too can become convinced that God can only work in ways we have already thought out. But the Emmaus story shows us the mistake of this type of thinking. And it drives home another important point. We can come up with the 100 step plans, throw all the money in the world at a problem, and it still won’t work if at the heart of the work is a commitment to EXPERIENCES with the risen Christ... experiences around a table, with someone who looks like a stranger... but in the firelight begins to glow a little differently... Amen.

³ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 404.