

### ***With Us on the Way***

In the name of him who died for our sin and is risen indeed, dear friends in Christ: in this morning's Gospel we join two former followers of Jesus as they travel on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the afternoon of the day of Jesus' resurrection. They are not of the twelve disciples closest to Jesus, but rather part of that larger group of devotees who came with Jesus to the Holy City from Galilee. And I call them *former* followers because they no longer believe in him. That, no doubt, is why they're leaving town. They hope to put some distance between themselves and the rest of those who got caught up in the whirlwind of excitement that surrounded the man named Jesus – and who so recently had all their hopes and dreams dashed to pieces.

Put yourself in their sandals as they walk along. Exactly one week ago they were on top of the world. That Sunday they paraded into Jerusalem with Jesus waving palm branches and hailing him as the long-expected Savior. They were convinced that he was the greater Son of David who would restore the fortunes of God's people and the Kingdom of Israel. All the signs were there. He was, after all, the one who fed 5000 with a little boy's lunch, who healed the sick, who cast out demons, and who raised the dead. They'd seen these things with their own eyes. They were absolutely sure about him. But something had gone horribly wrong. Late Thursday night he'd been arrested. The religious leaders, who were jealous of him, condemned him to death in a shady and illegal sham of a trial. At daybreak on Friday, they delivered him to the Roman Governor. They manipulated him into agreeing to Jesus' crucifixion. And by midmorning, Jesus, battered and beaten beyond recognition, was nailed to a cross. By 4:00PM he was dead. Right before sunset his mangled corpse was sealed in a limestone tomb.

It had all happened so unbelievably fast – this series of sudden and unforeseen upsets. Each one set their heads spinning; but taken all together they were devastating to the disciples. How could it have happened? The man they *knew* to be the hope of the nation was dead. Their faith in him was shattered. They'd spent Saturday, the Sabbath, in complete shock. Sitting in stony silence, each one fearing to speak aloud what they were thinking, while they relived in their minds each horrendous scene, trying to put the pieces together; but none of it made sense. And then on top of it all was this morning's confusion: the women returning from their errand with a crazed tale of an open tomb, a missing body, and angels who said that Jesus is alive. And sure enough, when more trusted witnesses were sent, they too found the grave open and the body gone. Fortunately, they had no hallucinations of angels. It seemed that the enemies of Jesus weren't satisfied just having him killed in the worst way imaginable. They wanted to desecrate his corpse as well—so much did they hate him; which raised the question “What are they going to do to us?” The two disciples heading to Emmaus were among those who didn't want to wait around to find out.

So they set off together. Their hearts are heavy. They're sad and disillusioned. Their spirits are crushed. And maybe too there is a bit of anger – anger at having been deceived. But now free of the gloomy pall surrounding the others, they begin to give voice to their thoughts. The general theme of their discussion is this: “How could we have been so wrong about him?” Back and forth the conversation goes, growing increasingly animated. “Yes, but how could he have done all those things if he wasn't the Promised One?” “I know. I thought so too. But you saw what happened. And now he's dead! It's over. How could the Lord have allowed his Holy One to be killed? Obviously, Jesus wasn't who we thought he was.” “Yes, but ....” “I don't

know; but I'll tell you one thing: I won't be fooled again. I'm never going to place my trust in any so-called Messiah ever again."

So the conversation goes. And they're so wrapped up in it that for some time they don't notice that another traveler has joined them on the way. Thanks to St. Luke, we know it's Jesus. And it's one of the many ironic twists of this account; for you see, the two are on the way to Emmaus, which means "With Us". And that's exactly where Jesus is: with them; but they don't know it. Though they see his face and hear his voice, they do not *know* him. In fact, we're told their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And this, of course, is the problem. It's the same Jesus, same face, same voice; the trouble is that they never really knew him. They had their own understanding of what the Savior was supposed to be, and Jesus didn't fit that description – especially by dying. So seeing him now, they do not see. And hearing him, they do not hear. That's what unbelief does. And that's what they are: unbelievers.

Jesus intends to make them believers, so he asks them what they're talking about. The response of the one named Cleopas is priceless: "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been going on around here for the past few days?" It's beautiful. The truth is that Jesus is the only one who really does know and understand what's been going on. It all unfolded exactly according to God's plan – and just as Jesus himself had told them it would. But they did not believe; and so they did not hear.

"Tell me about it", Jesus says. And so they do. They give an accurate summary of Jesus' life and ministry. But they leave out one very important detail. Though they call Jesus a man and a prophet mighty in word and deed, they fail to mention that they had also confessed him to be the Son of the Living God. I suspect they didn't want to embarrass themselves in front of this stranger by showing how deeply deceived they'd been. They wanted to spare themselves the sting of a comment like, "Wait. You thought this guy who died was God's Son? Man, are you gullible." Other than that, however, they tell pretty much the whole story – even mentioning how the women told of angels who said that Jesus was alive. So the thing for us to see here is that they have it all. They know all the details. But it does them no good because they do not believe.

And Jesus comes down on them pretty hard about it. "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!" We are elsewhere told of how Jesus marveled at people's unbelief. He couldn't understand it. He couldn't because his spirit was untainted by sin – and all sin has at its root a lack of faith in the Word of God. For Jesus, trusting the Word of God was as natural as breathing. And breathing is a good way to describe it, for the Holy Scriptures are called the breath of God. We're told that God breathed his Word into the prophets of old just as he breathed the Spirit of Life into the first man. And so it goes. This is how God works: through his Word he breathes life into those who are dead in sin and unbelief.

And that's what happens here as the account goes on. It's always amazed me that at this point Jesus doesn't simply say to the Emmaus disciples, "Hey guys, snap out of it. Look. It's me. I've risen from the dead." Why doesn't he do that? It's because the problem isn't with their eyes, it's with their hearts. They can't truly see and know him because they do not believe in him. So Jesus does what's necessary to cause them to believe. He speaks God's powerful Word to them. And through it, he breathes the Spirit of life into their dead hearts.

Beginning with Moses and all of the Prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself: how with one accord all that is written testifies that it was necessary for the Christ, true God and true man, to suffer, to die, and to rise again and then to

enter into his glory. And how I wish I'd been there to hear that exposition of Scripture, and learn how Jesus himself showed how all the Bible is about him, and how through him God planned to save the world from sin. Of course, he would be speaking in Aramaic and I wouldn't have understood a word of it. So maybe it's not such a great ambition. Then again, properly understood, maybe it's a wish that *is* being fulfilled in another way.

What I mean is this: there's a reason that Jesus chose to spend the better part of the day of his resurrection – arguably the most important day in human history – with these two guys on the road to Emmaus. And there's a reason too why he spent almost that entire time explaining the Scriptures to them and revealing himself through the written Word. It's because that's how he still does things today. My friends, *we are* the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is walking *with us* on the way. And no, like the Emmaus disciples, we do not see him. But we do hear his voice – even if we don't recognize it. And like the Emmaus disciples, as we walk along through life sad and disappointed and frustrated and disillusioned because of the way things are in this fallen world, and as we struggle to understand why God did things this way or why he allowed that to happen—that is to say, as we walk along doubting the love and promises of God, Jesus himself joins us on the journey and he speaks to us through his Word.

And through it, he reveals himself and breathes faith in him into our hearts by the power of his Spirit. In this way we learn who and what kind of Savior Jesus really is. For example, in Adam by whose disobedience, sin and death passed to all, we see a portrait of Jesus by whose perfect life and death for sin righteousness is passed to all. In Isaac, the beloved and long expected child of promise whom Abraham was to sacrifice to prove his faithfulness to God, we see Jesus: the long-expected Child of Promise who was sacrificed to show the Father's faithfulness to us. In Esau, the beloved firstborn, who gave away his birthright and was made a servant to his brother, we see Jesus, the beloved firstborn Son of God, who gave us his birthright and was made a servant for our sakes – bearing even the curse of our sins to the cross. In Joseph, the beloved son betrayed by his brothers, sold for silver, and who descended into slavery in Egypt, and who then rose in glory at the king's right hand, saved the world from death by starvation, and forgave his brothers – well, I don't need to unpack it for you. You see Jesus in him, don't you? And I could go on. For this year's Lenten devotions we saw how the person and work of Jesus were revealed in the various Judges of Israel. And there are many more examples of biblical characters that reveal to us Christ. And he's seen not just in the characters, but also in the things and events: Jesus is seen in the ark of Noah that saved those who believe from God's judgment, in the bronze serpent that Moses raised on the staff to save those who looked upon it, in the Passover lambs upon which the people fed while those not protected by the blood of the lambs perished, and in so many other things. All of God's Word reveals Jesus and his work to save us from our sins.

And that's what we do here each week together. We get on the road to Emmaus, as it were, and Jesus, unseen, joins us. We listen to the appointed texts of Scripture. It's Jesus speaking. And then we hear one or more of the texts explained. That's what a sermon is. Its purpose is to show you how Christ and his work to save us are revealed in what we heard. It's the same thing that happened to the Emmaus disciples. The only difference is that instead of hearing his voice directly, you hear Jesus speaking through me. But it's the same Jesus. And through his speaking, he gives the gift of faith and so brings to life those who are dead.

We know it worked for the Emmaus disciples. By the time they got to their destination, they were convinced. They believed in the resurrection of Jesus. And they believed that he was in fact the Christ, the Son of the Living God, sent to be their Savior from sin. They saw it in the Scriptures. And they wanted this fascinating stranger they met on the way to stay with them.

They wanted to hear more of his words. And now that they did believe, they were ready to see what they could not before. They were ready to see Jesus. And he did show himself to them, ever so briefly, in the breaking of the bread.

Of course: because that's where we see him too. Jesus, whom we hear but do not see, reveals himself to us visibly in the breaking of the bread. That's what happens at Holy Communion. When the Words of Institution are spoken, Jesus unites himself with the sacramental bread and wine and thus becomes visible to those who by God's power believe his words. So we rightly sing when whenever this is done "Behold – that is, Look – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." We're saying, "Yes, now I see Jesus."

And what happened next for the Emmaus disciples is very telling. Having now recognized Jesus who was with them all day unseen – and who now has disappeared from their sight but nevertheless remains just as present with them – we're told that they arise again in that same hour and go back to Jerusalem. And you may think, "We'll sure, they're excited and they want to let the other disciples know." That's true; but the key is the word used to describe their getting up again. In Greek it's "*anastasis*". It's the same word that's in other places translated "resurrection". The point being highlighted is that now, having heard, believed in, and seen the risen Lord Jesus, they too are raised to new life. It calls to mind the words of Jesus in John chapter five, where he tells his disciples, "The days are coming and are now here when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and those who hear will live." That's what's been happening to them all afternoon. They weren't just traveling to Emmaus. They were passing from death to life as they heard the words of Jesus who was with them all the while on the way.

And the same is true of us as we make our way through life. The risen Lord Jesus is with us on the way. And as he speaks his Word to us, and as we understand how in it he is revealed, we too are raised from death to life. We arise, free and forgiven, wanting to do God's will and to share the good news: the good news of Jesus who came to be our Savior, who suffered and died for our sins, who was raised to life again, and who is always and ever with us on the way. In his holy name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***