

# THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

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## With the Risen Christ There's Always Hope

### Luke 24:13-35

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

<sup>19</sup> "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Here's a fun fact about your pastor: I've never seen the Tigers lose a game at Comerica Park in Detroit. I saw them lose in Chicago last summer, but I've never attended a game in Detroit – and I've been to my fair share - where they've lost. I imagine the day I do will be disappointing. Because Detroit's far enough away that you don't go to a Tigers game on a whim. You gotta plan for it and schedule it. You gotta pay for it. As a result, the anticipation builds as the date gets closer and closer. So much so that my expectations are pretty high by the time I finally take my seat. So, I imagine it will be a disappointment to on day see them lose.

You don't have to attend Major League Baseball games to identify with the sentiment I'm describing. There are all sorts of things we've looked forward to but in the end disappoint us. Sometimes deeply. Sometimes profoundly. It's highly likely that more than a few of us came here today with such a thudding sense ... over things far more serious than baseball games. Maybe something or someone you pinned your hopes on seriously let you down.

Today's Holy Gospel prominently featured a couple such people, two disciples carrying that crushing sense of being let down that lingers somewhere in a triangle between anger, hurt, and depression. They're on the way to Emmaus. Think, "headed for the exists" because in their minds the game is lost. Because in their heart they just couldn't bear to be in Jerusalem any longer.

But as you heard, Jesus walks up beside them. Yet they're so preoccupied with their misery they don't realize it's him. When he asks what's on their minds, they can't even find the words. "They stood still, their faces downcast" (Luke 24:17). You wonder if they were swallowing hard to compose themselves, trying not to lose it.

Then Jesus asks, ‘What’s all this about?’ And their mood turns from sorrow to disbelief, anger, and sarcasm. “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” (24:18). Even though they think this fellow traveler totally stupid, they describe their disappointment to him. They followed a man they took to be “powerful in word and deed” (24:19), but now he was gone – suddenly, brutally, and totally gone. They’ve had the rug pulled out from under them and they’ve crashed nose-first into the floor. Bloodied and broken they utter the killer line: “But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (24:21). They were saying their world had fallen apart. ‘We had hoped he was the Messiah. We trusted him. We believed in him. But he’s disappointed us.

One more thing they add: “some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body” (24:22). So why were they leaving? It shows how utterly disappointed were they that had no energy or will or faith left to put any hope in the reports coming back from the empty tomb.

I’m guessing everyone here knows what it feels like to be sucker punched by disappointment – to feel utterly let down by a loved one, by a trusted leader, by yourself, by God even. You know the wordless grief, the difficulty of even expressing yourself, the anger at the person who shows concern, and the fear of falling in for false hope that will only make matters worse.

Nearly fifty years ago psychologist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross published the book *On Death and Dying*, which advanced her theory that grieving people go through five stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In the decades since new research has challenged some of her assertions, but her work remains incredibly influential. One of the good things about her theory is that it helps those grieving to realize that what they’re experiencing is not uncommon and that it won’t always feel like this. What’s not so good about her theory is the suggestion that grief can be managed and shaped and timed and ultimately dispensed with if one just follows steps. I think if someone had tried telling the disciples on the road to Emmaus they’re actually at stage four of the Kubler-Ross cycle, they would probably have got punched in the mouth. So, we need to be careful here too. This account isn’t about acceptance, coming to terms, and moving on. It’s about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Who, it turns out, didn’t rise from the dead to be a grief counselor. To be fair, he walked along way with his shattered disciples and heard them out. He let them say what they knew and thought and felt. But then he just flat out tells them they’re wrong! “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe” (24:25), he says to them. Again, be careful here. We’re not supposed to identify with Jesus in this account. God’s not calling us to talk to the disappointed and grieving this way, any more than he’s calling us to miraculously appear beside people and let them see our crucified hands and then vanish. The Holy Spirit put this account in Holy Scripture so that we’d identify with the disciples. Because God knows we will certainly face our own disappointment and even despair. And when we do we need to know what those two disciples came to know, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and is with us always in three very specific ways.

The first way is in the Scriptures. “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (24:25-27). Only in the Scriptures will you find that the cross was necessary for Christ and for us. That it wasn’t a terrible tragedy but the ultimate triumph of God’s redeeming grace and the only hope for the sinner’s salvation. Similarly, only in the Scriptures will you find that during your own times difficulty and disappointment – even though such times look like a mess - the risen Lord Jesus Christ is right there beside you. But not because you get goosebumps or because a ray of sunshine is well-timed. But because his Word says so. Even if God is trying to tell you something through goosebumps and sunshine, the chances of you even noticing and getting the message he intends is almost nil compared to simply listening to his Holy Word. Remember, our two disciples missed all the signs and got the meaning of everything they saw and felt and experienced completely wrong. It is only the Scriptures which opens our eyes to his presence and restores ours hope by its message of Jesus’ victory over sin, death and the grave.

The second way we can know the risen Christ is with us is in the church. Jesus once said, “For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them” (Mt 18:20). That’s exactly what happened on the way to Emmaus, at dinner at Emmaus and back in Jerusalem later that night. Disciples gathered in his name and it turns out he is with them! Turns out he is with us here and now! There is not a better place in your life to be with the risen Christ than in the church with sister and brother believers gathered around him. And not just the sisters and brothers you can see right now around you, or even in the other two services. I’m talking about the Holy Christian Church of all believers of all time and places and in eternity. The hymns we are singing today remind us of that. As the first one was Dutch, probably sung by other church this morning in West Michigan. The one you just sang was from Tanzania, sang by people who can’t even conceive your disappointments just like you can’t even image what their day to day

lives are like, and the final hymn is from First Century Syria, an entirely different era. Only a risen Christ could gather such a diverse people around himself and with his Word set all our hearts on fire!

The third way to know Jesus is risen from the dead is in the mission he's given us. The disappointment of the cross left our two disciples feeling useless, voiceless and hopeless. But because Christ is risen, they suddenly have a job to do, a purpose to fulfill, and Gospel to proclaim... now they're bursting with energy and a message of good news to tell other back in Jerusalem! Similarly, for those of us who perhaps often come here with a thudding sense of disappointment, we find Christ is risen! This makes us alive again and gives us the mission of going back from where we came, back out in the world, back to our lives but now with the good news. Because, if you haven't noticed, so most people are still headed in the wrong direction on the road to Emmaus: disappointed with life, devoid of hope, and not really knowing where to turn for help. Our mission is to bring Jesus alongside of them by sharing the word of his resurrection with them. It's to give them a place to belong in his church and a role to play in the same meaningful mission of proclaiming Christ is risen ... and that he's really here for us and for all, always giving hope!

Amen.