

The Third Sunday of Easter

May 4, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ 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. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 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?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. (NIV)

Have you ever felt lost? Have you ever been sad, perhaps even a bit depressed? Have you ever found yourself going the wrong way? Have you ever been disappointed, discouraged, or disheartened? Take a walk this morning with these two disciples on this road leading to Emmaus. They were lost, but not because they did not know what direction they were going. They were lost because they felt empty and without a purpose. They were sad, discouraged, and disheartened because the One that meant the most to them was gone and their hope with Him. They were going the wrong way not because they weren't heading the right way home, but because they were returning home confused and without the message they needed. So take this walk with them as suddenly a mysterious stranger joins them and shows them the way. Then pray God comes and does the same for His disciples here so that: **God's good news guides us on our way.**

It's Easter Sunday afternoon, but you sure couldn't tell it from the gloomy conversation between these two broken-hearted disciples. They're not singing, "*I know that my Redeemer lives,*" at least not yet! On Good Friday they saw their dear Master die. They probably hung around the hill long enough to watch Joseph and Nicodemus take his lifeless body down from the cross, wrap it in linens, and bury it in a grave. Their whole life had now come unglued because their Jesus is dead and gone forever.

How wrong these Emmaus disciples turned out to be! We read: "***As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him***". This was not some ghost on that road to Emmaus. The crucified, risen, and forever living Lord Jesus Christ will never be found in any cemetery. But He isn't ready just yet to let his two followers find that out. First, He must do some teaching. This stranger joins their conversation: "*What are you talking about?*" he asks. That question stops them in their tracks. They're shocked this stranger doesn't seem to have a clue about what's been going on in the neighborhood. Cleopas says to Jesus: "***Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?***"

That sets off a tale of woe from their lips, an unburdening of their heavy hearts that reveals a feeble understanding of God's whole plan of salvation. They tell this stranger how they had been followers of Jesus. They had believed his promises. They had seen power in His miracles and teaching. But Jesus had died. His enemies had arrested him, beat him, and then crucified him. And Jesus didn't lift a finger to stop it. Oh, they had heard reports that He wasn't in His grave anymore and the grave was empty, but that didn't mean anything to them. Like so many people today, these depressed disciples, without any faith or hope in a risen Lord Jesus, felt like their whole life was meaningless.

Jesus patiently listens to them. Then He has something to say: "***How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?***" These poor fellows only believed what they wanted to believe, and so had missed out on the best part of the Bible. Another traveler on his way through Europe can across a carving on a lamb high up on a stone near the top of a church tower. He asked for an explanation why that carving was in such a place so high up in an unlikely location. He was then told the story of how when the church was built one of the workers lost his footing and fell from the scaffolding. His fellow workers hurried to the ground and were shocked to see the man alive and standing there brushing the dust from his clothes. He had fallen into the middle of a flock of sheep, and pointing to a lamb at his feet he said, "*That lamb was crushed, but I live.*" This is what these two disciples had yet to realize. They missed the whole point of the Passover which they just went to Jerusalem to celebrate. They did not understand the Bible's central teaching that the lamb was crushed so that we may live – that the Christ had to suffer those things.

That's why Jesus conducted a Bible Class out there on the road to Emmaus. He opened up the whole Old Testament for them. He helped them to see why Christ had to suffer and die first and then rise from the dead. That was the only way these sinful men and you and I could ever hope to get to heaven. It sure would've been nice to have had a tape recording of that Bible Class, because when the two disciples got to their driveway, they weren't down in the dumps anymore. When Jesus attempted to go on they said, "***Please, stay with us!***" I believe they said that, not just because they were concerned about this stranger traveling at night, but because they themselves didn't want to go in and go on without him.

Now we read these awesome words: ***“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight”***. A day that had started out so miserably becomes the happiest day of their lives. They see their dear Friend and their precious Savior, not dead at all, but gloriously alive. Listen to what they said to each other: ***“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*** Never again would these disciples be all alone. Never again would their lives be meaningless. Their hopelessness and their sorrow were gone. In their place was this indescribable joy from a Risen Savior who had warmed their hearts! They had good news to guide them on their way.

Oh how our Jesus wants to give you and me the same. He is alive and lives forever. But this risen Savior knows how discouraging, how empty, yes, how hopeless life can be when we don't have this good news to guide us. Our personal failures, our daily mistakes, our shameful sins load us up with an unbearable burden of guilt. We work and work and seem to get nowhere. We get sick, our kids have their share of problems, our dear ones die, and at times there seem to be more troubles than there are solutions. But dear friends, just as Jesus caught up with these two disciples on the road and walked the rest of the way with them, He lives to catch up with each of us to walk the rest of the way with us down that not-so-easy road called life. He lives to talk to us whenever we open up his Word. Yet how often might Jesus have to say to us? ***“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”*** How foolish you are not to open up your Bibles more than you do...how foolish when the message of my perfect life, my saving death, and triumphant resurrection will always cheer you up and comfort you even in the worst of days...how foolish to let your Bibles collect dust when a daily diet of my Word in family devotions during the week and family worship on Sunday mornings will always bring my peace, my strength, and my guidance to your lives!”

The cross is empty. So is the tomb. We really are forgiven of any and every sin! He really is our Savior! That will never change! All of His promises in here are unbreakable and unshakeable. That's because He lives as the almighty Son of God to keep every last one of them. Because He lives, we don't ever face any problem, any hurt, or any care alone. Wherever we go, whatever we are doing, however hard the circumstances and pressures might be, like those Emmaus disciples we can say to Jesus ***“Please, stay with us,”*** and he will. When we are facing tough times or great trials, He'll always be right beside us to see us through – even through death and the grave. Now that's good news to guide us on our way!

But there's something else those two Emmaus disciples did on the first Easter Sunday. Not only did they hear the good news about the risen Savior, their hearts were also on fire to share him with others. They didn't sit around that supper table very long, did they? After seeing their Lord alive, they got up and walked those 7 miles all the way miles back again to Jerusalem in the dark. Maybe they ran! What a happy hike it was this time! Our text says: ***“There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread”***.

There gloom was gone as they encouraged each other with the good news of a crucified and risen Savior. After that day they kept passing on the good news to thousands of other sinners just like themselves. What a great time of year for us to do the same. With the Easter truth still fresh in our minds and with Easter joy still warming our hearts, I pray we look for opportunities to encourage one another and to share with others the good news. You don't have

to run seven miles to do it – just do it because you now know what it is to have hope, to have purpose, to have meaning and direction in life, to have good news to guide you on your way. Christ is risen indeed! Amen.