

Sermon for Sunday April 26. The Third Sunday of Easter.

## **Luke 24:13-35**

### **The Walk to Emmaus**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then 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?' He 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and 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. Some 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.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They 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?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to

Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Sermon - You can probably think of a time when you received really bad news that broke your heart. It was a huge shock to your life. What did you do when you heard that news? Who did you talk to about it? For Jesus' first disciples, they knew things were grim when he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter followed to the High Priest's Palace. John followed to the cross, where Jesus, gasping for breath, told John to look after Mary, Jesus' mother. We know some of Jesus' women disciples were there when he died, when his body was taken off the cross, and then taken to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. They all were heartbroken. And so were all those who loved Jesus. Not all were at the cross, but the news got around, that Our Lord and Savior is dead. Some gathered to console each other. We know that the 10 apostles were together on the night of Easter, without Thomas. They were gathered behind locked doors, frightened of the authorities. By then a few, women and men, had seen the empty tomb, had heard the report that an angel had said that Jesus has been raised. It was hard to put it together. Two disciples, one of them called Cleopas, decided not to huddle with the others, but instead to make a retreat out of the city of Jerusalem to a small village called Emmaus. Perhaps one or both of them came from there. Some people who are processing heavy news like to get away a little, away from the

center of the intensity, to be on their own, or this case, just to be with one other person, not a group. I really feel for people who have lost loved ones to the Covid virus. They weren't allowed to be there when their loved one died. And sometimes death from Covid comes quickly. And occasionally to more than one in the family. Jesus help them. Shelley Ausham from our church is grieving the loss of a friend and former work colleague to Covid. His name is Darrien, and he only 52. Please pray for all of Darrien's family and friends. The two disciples walking to Emmaus have heavy steps. And they may have had tears in their eyes as they walked along, talking about what had happened to Jesus. And this is where a stranger joins them and questions them about what they are talking about. And they stop, looking sad. And Cleopas tells the stranger about what happened to Jesus. Cleopas says; "he was a prophet mighty in words and actions before God and all the people, but the chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Oh, and something else. Some of the women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said that he is alive. Some 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." And this stranger, chastises them a little, maybe a lot; "Oh, how foolish you are, how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have

declared. Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into glory?" And the stranger interpreted for the walkers, the grievers, what was said in the Hebrew scriptures, the Torah and the prophets, about him. For us hearing this story, we already know the stranger to be Jesus. I wonder what scriptures he spoke of. Perhaps Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant – "he was despised and rejected by people, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities." It sounds like the stranger walked with them for most of the way. As they reached Emmaus, the stranger looked to be going on further, but the two strongly urged him to stay, telling him that it is almost evening, night is coming. Better to come on in. So the stranger goes into the house to stay with them. And then they have the evening meal, well they are about to get started on it. The stranger took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Doesn't that sound familiar. It was familiar to them. That has to be Jesus, their Lord and Saviour, but as they have come to their senses, Jesus has vanished, he's gone. Can you see the look on their faces? Now they personally know that he is really truly alive. They say – "Were not our hearts burning with us while he was talking with us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That was him all along. Now what are they going to do. Stay in retreat. No. I'm not sure if they even bother eating more food. They return quickly to Jerusalem, this time with a spring in their step. The 7 miles

seem like nothing. They find the 10 and the other disciples gathered, who tell them that Jesus truly is risen, and has appeared to Peter. And the two tell of their resurrection sighting, of what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had made himself known to them in the breaking of the bread. It's no wonder that the Emmaus Easter story is a favourite of many. Did you see yourself in any part of the story? You may have been in a heavy place like Cleopas and his friend, when Jesus was walking alongside of you, and you didn't recognize him. It seems a heavy time right now. There is so much uncertainty with this virus. It is effecting all of the world deeply. If you have lost your livelihood at this time, that is heavy. And in many countries, where people get paid on a daily basis for menial work, these are super desperate times. There is little or no money left, and like in Nigeria, the price of rice has doubled in the corona time. We pray for all whose road is heavy at this time, for them personally, and/or for people they love. May they know support. And good if they recognize Jesus with them; walking with them all the way. It is a powerful statement that those two disciples made about their hearts burning within them on the road as Jesus unfolds the scriptures to them. When has your heart been burning within you, where Jesus was truly unfolding the truth about himself, and about you. People in the Sermonlab have sometimes given such a witness. I'm sad we can't meet in person to study the word. We can't group as we used to. And we can't be in worship. But we have received a lot of appreciation for the sermons, the various videos that

have been made for our YouTube video channel. Some of our more homebound people have had much more access to our worship and teaching than before. I thank God for these means of communication in this very challenging time. And I pray that we can get back together again at the right time. But now we can say we are together on the road with Jesus. He meets us on the way, teaching, unfolding the truth. One of the truths is that the Messiah had to suffer to bring life to the world. He knows the deepest of pain and shame. He knows about grief. Jesus knows exactly what you are going through. You can talk to him about anything, no matter how dark. He is good with lament, with anger, with whatever you want to say. And listen to what he has to say. You may need to be still. I think that Isaiah 53 really gets deep about the suffering. It really sounds like it is talking about Jesus, how he has taken our pain, our sin, so that we can walk with more of a spring in our step, especially knowing that the suffering one is alive, and meeting us on the way. In the ELCA we use the word 'synod' a lot. We use it for a district, a region, that is led by a bishop. The word literally means – with each other on the way, or the road. We have a whole lot of Jesus people with us on the way, and we with them. Bishop Suzanne Dillahunt will be leading a Zoom-in town hall for the rostered leaders of our synod this Thursday, for us to get the latest updates on what the governor's gradual opening up might mean for churches. Pray for our bishop and her staff as they seek to bring wisdom into these difficult times. Pray for your church leaders at Ascension. Those Emmaus

disciples invited Jesus into their home. And they had bread there which he blessed and broke, and in doing something so familiar, it got them seeing that it really was him who had been with them all along. At Holy Communion in the Easter season, we sometimes use a prayer that talks about recognizing Jesus in the meal. We miss that meal together. Some churches are trying a virtual communion – where people watch the worship online, and use their own bread or wine, or it is sent or delivered. A few churches have drive-in church, and walk up communion all in the parking area. Thinking of our church, I think it best that we wait to commune again when we can be together. I know that may be some time still. It's like a long fast. Just as the two disciples invited Jesus into their home to eat there, remember Jesus at your table when you are eating. You could have an empty chair for him if there is space. And share the Good News that he is alive wherever you go. Amen.