

Luke 24:13-35  
Third Sunday of Easter  
April 26, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I imagine that, whenever we walk down the road, most of our conversation focuses on the matters most on our mind. The Lord wants His Holy Law and His Perfect Will for His creation to be foremost in our minds, which is why he commands us to “Teach these things to your children when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road.”

But, we sinners often lose focus of God’s perfect will because our minds become captive to the problems all around us, so that – in these days of great distress – we take our walks while talking about virus and mortality rates and shelter-in-place mandates.

Two thousand years ago, God provided the answer for all of this, so that those walking along the road that Easter night could be focused on a prophet of mighty deeds, unfair trials by the Sanhedrin, crucifixion and odd reports – perhaps (so far) only *anecdotally*-

substantiated and not government-approved – reports of *resurrection*.

“Are you the only one in Jerusalem who has not heard these reports?” they ask, their minds completely absorbed by the doubts and despair and uncertainty and insecurity of what it all means. Sound familiar?

And how does Jesus respond?: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that was spoken by the prophets. Was it not necessary (both as fulfillment of the Holy Law to avenge God’s anger, but also necessary as the gracious work of God in promising His Messiah)... was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter his glory?” And then the text says, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them all things in the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Now, let’s pause on this statement for a minute and ask a question: to whose authority does Jesus appeal here? On the one hand, we could say the prophets’ – “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe *the prophets*,” Jesus said. Yes, friends, the word of the prophets carries some divine weight, doesn’t it, so that the disciples (who in their despair have forgotten that word of the prophets) forget that such word defines the truth and hope for daily life. Then again, Jesus also appeals to Moses and, in fact, Luke says that Jesus appeals to the whole Old Testament Scriptures to teach these

doubting disciples to better understand what had happened in those historic three days.

But, really, as he appeals to all of them, he points to *them* as confessing Him. He's the ultimate authority... He's their hope and definition for daily life. He – the Christ – is the very one whom they should hope in... even in the face of adversity, they ought hang on his every promise, rather than walk in foolish and aimless sorrow.

Of course, the disciples don't recognize Jesus in this situation, so they continue on for a while and invite this supposed stranger to stay with them that evening. And, while at table together, he blessed the bread and broke it and gave it to them, and they then recognized him. And in recognizing him, all their doubts dissipated; all their fears fled. And, they even recognized in that moment of the Supper that it was this Jesus of the Supper who made their hearts burn with confidence at His Holy Word, who opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and completely reinterpret their understanding of life's seemingly darkest days by it.

Now, friends, as I said last week, we have to be very careful about initially inserting these texts directly into our situation, as if they are not foremost history: Truly in history, when it appeared that the Christ was dead and that the prophets had been proven futile and empty of divine promise, it was the risen Christ himself who demonstrated that all the words of the prophets, all the hope of the faithful lineage, all the promises of God, had actually been fulfilled in

that historic weekend. It was the risen Christ who showed himself to the two disciples in the breaking of the bread, that they might have certainty that His Word had not been, and could not be, broken. It was the risen Christ himself whose word caused their hearts to burn in faith and confidence and joy that the Scriptures could and should be viewed through a lens of divine victory rather than through a lens of the Messiah's misfortune. Yes, it was the risen Christ... his disciples needed not just to hear *about* Him, but *from* Him... they needed not only to gather *in remembrance of* him, but *with* Him. And, as they did, as they were given that wondrous gift and occasion by their resurrected Christ, their hearts burned with faith and conviction and joy.

Thanks be to God that the risen Christ appeared to his disciples, for – as St Paul says it – it is these very appearances that cement the historicity of Christ's victory over sin, death, and the grave. And, if Christ is risen, then our victory over death is our certain inheritance.

And that's why we can then learn to apply this to ourselves and to our life's situations... not as if "connecting the dots" to capture 'the moral of the story,' but rather applying the benefit of the history to ourselves... or, more correctly, having the benefits of history applied to us.

You see, the risen Christ Jesus is still just as active among his Church, among his doubting disciples, as He was that first Easter

evening. The same Jesus is going about the same work of lifting up His people in the same ways. For what ways did he use along the road that evening; what means did he employ to bring to them his grace and embolden their faith? – Was it not the Word and the Sacrament? The same Word and Sacrament that he promises you, not only in and for life’s good days, but in and for life’s seemingly darkest days.

Yes, this same risen Jesus still comes to His anxious Church in the same ways. We need to not just hear *about Him*, but from Him... benefit not by feasting *in remembrance of Him*, but *with Him*. This is a confession we may joyfully and boldly make – not only in the face of a virus, but also in the face of a society reimagining life on account of this virus. How many people, how many entire church bodies, have already given into the notion that life *must* change in the face of this virus? That life in the Church must change? That God’s care of His people must change?

Just this week, my wife pointed out to me an article in one of the homeschool magazines we get (and actually, one of our confirmands also pointed out this quote) which reads, “Christians don’t rely only on going to a church to strengthen their faith. The virus shutdown is an opportunity for growing in *personal* worship...” Then it cites John 4:24, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in *spirit* and truth.” (Worldkids magazine). What a horrific teaching, that ‘spiritual’ worship means personal virtual

worship *apart from* the presence of our incarnate God! How injurious to souls... to attempt to rationalize as Biblically encouraged the social distancing from God's Divine Service for his people!

Friends, as we walk down the road talking about the events that have transpired, has the Church become so pre-occupied with this virus, almost adopting a belief that this pandemic has overcome the power of our Messiah, that we don't even recognize our Christ among us in these depressing days... that we have convinced ourselves His divine promises and gifts are "nonessential" and lay lifelessly "on hold"? Are we so focused on these new extremes of daily life that any confession that Christ has overcome disease and grave is seen as an idle tale and anecdotal report of a mistaken woman struggling to cope with the death of her Lord?

Do *you* wonder why we shouldn't just rely on the Word in these days? Perhaps because the Sacrament most intimately guarantees – more than that – *gives* us Christ among and with us? Many of us have gone six weeks without Absolution, six weeks without the Sacrament of the Altar, and perhaps we even start to convince ourselves that "my faith seems to be doing fine without them." One parishioner commented this past week, "I thought to myself that I was doing okay and didn't really need the Sacrament, and *that thought* made me really scared." Really scared not because we don't have the Word apart from the Supper, but because the Church-at-large is allowing Christ's theology to be redefined by our

circumstances, allowing ourselves to be convinced that Christ Jesus – with his way of serving and sustaining His people – He must be the only one in town who doesn't know what's going on! Yes, as dangerous as this situation has been to physical health, it's proving equally (more) dangerous to spiritual health.

Thanks be to God that the Lord Jesus is patient with us... that he comes up alongside us and walks with us. And he does so to teach, even lovingly chiding us, “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe the prophets.” Didn't the prophets prophesy that God disciplines those he loves through pestilence and plague and thereby teaches them to keep their eyes fixed on the coming Messiah? Didn't Jesus himself prophesy that pestilence and plague would be part of the latter days for this creation and predate the full unveiling of the new creation? So, why – in these times that still point to Him – why would the Church-at-large allow society and government to convince us that His Divine Service is somehow nonessential or even dangerous for His Church in these days, when the prophets, the gospels, the epistles all speak of Christ caring for His Church through these latter days specifically through that Divine Service and those means of grace? In our Ladies' Book of Concord study this week, we read in the Formula of Concord that God gives us the Sacraments, which we ought flee to “in our most severe temptations and take comfort in them” ... and yet some in our own Church body have called for some invention they call a “Eucharistic fast” ... a time of

fasting from the very means by which Jesus showed those two disciples that first Easter night that He was alive... *with them, for them.*

Even on that first Easter evening, the same evening in which the Lord declared Absolution to be essential for his faithful, He also proved by His own presence that His own incarnate, risen presence with us and for us was essential to the life and certainty and sustenance of Christ's Church.

Now, how do we hear this? Do we receive this as a loving chiding? Are we only remembering in this Jesus' first words, "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe"? So be it... but that speaks not to the harshness of Jesus' words, but to the frailty of our faith. Why would we (during these weeks of shelter-in-place) hear as law or grow indifferent toward the divine invitation to be cared for by Christ himself in *all* the means of grace He instituted for the care of His Church in good times and in bad times... the care He Himself would give us when teaching us the Holy Word, feeding us the Holy Supper, forgiving us by his Holy Absolution? Aren't these the most glorious of heavenly gifts... the most precious of God's plans to forgive our sins, bestow his grace, and strengthen faith? Yes, even that first Easter evening, he instituted Absolution in a gathering of only 10 apostles... and, that same evening, He proclaimed the Word of His death and resurrection and celebrated the Sacrament where two or three were gathered together.



Friends, if you're like the majority of people, you might right now be a little anxious about gathering with *anyone* - even to hear the Word; it's okay to admit that. You might fear receiving the Supper right now... you might reimagine the Christian faith as not needing Absolution right now. It's okay even to admit that the state mandate currently preventing us from gathering is a helpful excuse to not have to make the difficult decision ourselves!

Friends, it's okay to admit that this situation makes us feel uneasy. Let's not pretend that the government one day saying you can gather with 10 people is going to suddenly change the psyche or suddenly safeguard the body. **But let's also not allow ourselves to think that Christ is the only one in town who doesn't know what's going on.** Indeed, did the two disciples that night not have *more* reason to despair than do we? – they thought their Messiah was dead! We *know* he lives and, as he lives, then – no matter what virus or illness or grave harasses us – our lives are hidden with Christ in God!

Do our hearts not burn within, when we hear His Word promise us our dear Lord's continual care, just as He promised. How our hearts may burn within us in bold confidence that Christ has promised to be with us even in life's most seemingly hopeless situations – He who has overcome death and the grave – He has promised to be with you, the Good Shepherd caring for and nurturing and feeding and safeguarding His beloved sheep...

nurturing and sustaining us *with* eternal benefits, *for* eternal life, rendering any rationalistic fear of temporal death to be far less significant than the benefits we receive. Yes, to have that assurance that our risen Lord is with us through every trial of life, *that* is reason that He broke bread with his disciples and they recognized him “incarnationally.” *That* is reason that His Church on Pentecost devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine and to the “breaking of bread and the fellowship and the prayers”... for there they knew their victorious God-man was with them for whatever trial and tempest lay ahead... that, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art *with* me... Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, my cup runneth over.”... Or, as Jesus himself says it, “My body, for you. My blood, for you.”.... just as all the Holy Scriptures have pointed to this promise... just as all the new covenant has been established around this promise... just as the breaking of bread opened those disciples’ eyes – and opens anew our eyes – to that promise. The risen Christ is *with* and *for* His Church, through His blessed means of grace... with us *always*.

Friends, may our hearts burn within us, hearing His Word and promise that He is still our risen Christ – to teach and focus and comfort his forlorn faithful... with the result that *every* day of life, we may learn to appeal to Him, “Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening, and the day is almost over.”

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul  
Calvary Lutheran Church  
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