

## **Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV**

### **Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: April 23, 2023 Yr. A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Text: Luke 24:13-35 The Road to Emmaus

Title: Recognizing Jesus

Focus: The disciples on the road to Emmaus must have had their own ideas of Jesus as Messiah. Their firm ideas and expectations may have limited their ability to recognize the risen Jesus, whose was fully revealed to them in the breaking of bread. Jesus is recognized by his acts of self-giving live—by his wounds and his willingness to be broken for our sake.

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

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>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?” <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. <sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?” <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

## Who Do We Recognize?

A few years back, I attended my 30<sup>th</sup> high school reunion from La Cañada High School in Southern California. Some of those who attended are people with whom I have been continuous friends all this time and who I see now and then—Anne and Kristy and Christy Joy and John Larsen, among some others.

There were others there who I may not have seen, but heard about from mutual friends or from Facebook. . .

Paula and Janice were there. They are identical twins like my brother and I. The four of us, along with Lisa and Leslie Sauro, another set of identical twins, were together featured on the cover of the *La Cañada Valley Sun*, the local weekly newspaper, the week that we graduated.

There was Arlene, who acknowledged that she was a “late bloomer.” She posts often on Facebook about her work and family.

There were guys from my basketball team like Eric.

Besides the people who I had kept in touch with in some way, there were people who attended who I am sure I had not seen since we shared classes and graduation all those many years ago. If you were to mention a person’s name, I might have a picture in my head of what I remember and what they looked like decades ago. That picture in my head might be like the nametags we each wore that night with our photo from our yearbook photo from our senior year.

And from that mental picture, I could attempt to extrapolate to what a person would look like 30 years later. In my head, I could probably allow for added pounds, crows’ feet around the eyes or wrinkles on the forehead. It was striking to me how quickly I could recall a person’s name when I had not seen them for 30 years. I recognized most people and their names came quickly to me.

The hardest people to recognize were those guys I knew who I recalled had long hair in high school and now were bald. Other than that, I seemed to recognize people pretty quickly and could even recall their name and something about them.

- Do you think you could recognize someone you hadn’t seen for 30 years? I was pleasantly surprised that I seemed to have an uncanny recollection. Their first and last name popped into my head when I saw them in a way that surprised me with how quickly it came.
- Do you think you could recognize someone you may have seen continuously over the preceding 3 years?

## “Their Eyes Were Kept from Recognizing Him”

In the story from Luke’s gospel today, Cleopas, a follower or disciple of Jesus (though not one of the 12), and another disciple, who is unnamed, were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of resurrection. One of the quirky elements of this story is that Jesus joins them as they walk along the way and yet, the text says,

- <sup>16</sup> their eyes were kept from recognizing him (Luke 24:16).

It’s quirky, isn’t it, that you or I might be able to recognize a classmate that we haven’t seen in 30 years, but these two particular disciples couldn’t recognize Jesus after likely spending a good part of three years following him. It is important to note that Cleopas was not one of the 12 particularly called disciples, and yet the story indicates he was a close follower of Jesus.

- **How do you think it is that they don’t recognize him?**

Even if these two weren’t part of the 12 disciples, you’d think that they’d recognize them, don’t you? How is it that they don’t recognize Jesus, *even after her began to explain things to them?*

**Here’s one factor to acknowledge about how or why they didn’t recognize him: The risen Jesus was different in bodily form.** From reading the different stories of how the risen Jesus interacted with his followers and observing their response to him, the body of the risen Jesus does appear to be different:

- In the Easter Sunday reading from John’s gospel, Mary Magdalene doesn’t immediately recognize him. She supposes this man to be the gardener and it’s not until he calls her by name that she recognizes him.
- In the reading from John’s gospel from last week, the doors are locked before them (John 20:19). A week later, the doors are shut, and he again appears and stands before them (20:26). His body doesn’t seem bound by the same rules that we expect. He suddenly appears before them and can just as quickly be gone.

So these two disciples, as well as some others at other times, may not recognize Jesus because he is different; his body is different.

**But here’s another reason—and it seems to be more significant: They don’t recognize him because they have their own expectations about what it means to be Messiah and what happened to Jesus doesn’t seem to fit:**

As this yet unknown stranger, Jesus joins them to walk alongside them on the road to Emmaus. He asks them what’s going on.

- “What are you talking about as you walk along?”
- “Are you the only one in all of Jerusalem who does not know these things that have happened in these days?”

- “What things?” the stranger asks.

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,<sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.<sup>21</sup> But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. (Luke 24:21).

Because things were going pretty well for a while—he was “a prophet mighty in word and deed” right up until he was killed.

**“We had hoped that he was the one. . .” (but apparently, he was not.)**

Because he was condemned to death and was killed and that was the end of that.

The disciples are disappointed in part because they fundamentally misunderstood how God was working to save the world. When they thought of the promised Messiah, they were expecting a God of power. Instead, they got one whose unconventional power was expressed through willing vulnerability. Instead of the warrior God they expected, they got a suffering servant.

### **But the Good News is. . . Jesus walks alongside us**

But the good news is that, despite their differing expectations that kept them from recognizing Jesus and despite their disappointment, Jesus still met them on the way. He met them on the road.

He walked alongside them. He was willing, even then, to bear their dashed hopes as expressed in that phrase, “We had hoped that he would be the one. . .” (v. 21).

What’s your own expression of “We had hoped?” How would we complete that sentence?

- We had hoped that this job would last. . .
- We had hoped that we would become pregnant. . .
- We had hoped that this medical procedure would relieve the pain or restore function or remove the cancer. . .
- We had hoped that our loved one could live longer. . .
- We had hoped. . .

The good news is that Jesus walks alongside us, not just on the mountaintop or peak experiences, but in daily living and as we experience the dashed hopes of our own lives. As demonstrated in this story, Jesus always meets us where we are, whether in celebration or mourning, whether in victory or defeat, whether in gladness or sorrow,

whether in times of health or sickness. Jesus joins us on the journey, while we're still on the road, to encourage us, accept us, and embolden us.

Jesus, still unrecognized by them, is modeling for us how we can care for one another during times of disappointment, loss, or dashed hopes. Even before Jesus interprets Scripture and before he breaks bread, he walks alongside them, and he listens to their story or invites them to name their loss. He walks alongside and he listens.

So that's a way of caring that we can follow: Before we talk, before we explain, before we invite, we come alongside and we listen.

That Jesus has first heard and acknowledge their pain, their disappointment, or their dashed hopes, makes them ready to be surprised to recognize Jesus in the next scene.

## They Recognize Jesus

**And then, how does Jesus reveal himself or how do they recognize him?**

From the reading from Last week when Jesus appears to first to the group of disciples and then the next week to Thomas, Jesus shows them the wounds in his hands and side. **His body still bears these wounds and they clearly recognize him by his wounds.**

He is recognized through his willingness to suffer or his willingness to be wounded for others. For bearing marks or scars or wounds. Another way to express it is that he is recognized through acts of self-giving love.

And from today's reading: Jesus is recognized **in the breaking of bread at the table**. Another act of self-giving love in which he says, "This is my body, broken for you." He offers himself as one who is willing to be broken or is willing to offer himself for our sake. He is seen or recognized through acts of self-giving love in which he displays his willingness to experience suffering or woundedness.

In this description of Jesus hosting at the table, you hear echoes of how we celebrate Communion, don't you?

<sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

You hear these four active verbs: take, bless, break, and give. We recognize Jesus at the table.

Did you notice what these two disciples did next?

- Jesus vanished from their sight (v. 31) (another example of his body doing an inexplicable thing.)

- Then they got up right away and excitedly went back to the others in Jerusalem.

They had walked all this way to Emmaus and they arrive there when it is “almost evening and the day [was] almost over” (v. 29). And now they’re so excited, that they had to go and tell the others, “The Lord has risen indeed!” (v. 34).

## **Closing Encouragement**

There are so many things in this story we could highlight. . . It is good news that

- Jesus walks alongside us, ready to listen and bear whatever dashed hopes we might have.
- We see or recognize him through his own acts of self-giving love, shown here in the breaking of bread and in his willingness to be broken for our sake.

So, take heart from this good news. You may feel like you need to walk 7 miles or it may feel more like 70 or 700. Be reassured that you do not walk alone, but you can bring your hopes—dashed or still growing and recognize Jesus in our midst.

Like these disciples, we are invited to move . . .

- From dashed hopes to hearts burning when we recognize Jesus
- From acknowledging loss to experiencing God’s presence and grace at the table
- From disappointment to joy

It is the movement of Christian faith from the despair of the cross to the empty tomb and from death to life. Thanks be to God for good news of Easter hope.