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Easter 3 Series A 2017

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Third Sunday of Easter, May 4

Having celebrated Easter morning and been awed by the manifestation of Jesus to the women and then the disciples last week, we will surely echo that joy this Sunday but also start to ask some questions of ourselves. What does this Resurrection now mean? Not to be flippant, but Jesus rose from the dead, so what? How does that help me now? What's he done lately?

I actually think that many of our folks who sit in our pews might have a hard time articulating this. Indeed as I look at the witness of Christianity to this world, too often judgmental and legalistic, I find that people have a hard time saying that it is a good thing to be a follower of Jesus. I have found that many of my folks would jump on the idea that Jesus is with us but then they would find it very difficult to point to any sort of a positive blessing that came from the presence of Christ. Sometimes, indeed, they seemed to be more than a little afraid of that, as if Jesus were some judgmental presence.

Today we will hear that the Lord who rose from the dead is also the beautiful, gentle presence in our lives. We are not alone. Jesus continues to walk the road with his disciples, a road you might simply call life. He listens to our concerns and speaks his answers to us. He is concerned about what weighs heavily upon our hearts. He is revealed for our eyes to see in the mundane and not so mundane breaking of bread. He abides with us, and gives energy to our feet and fills our mouths with wonderful stories to tell. Jesus is here today. One of the things he wants to do now that he has conquered death, and lives and reigns to all eternity, wielding all the power of God, receiving the praise of countless angels, one of the things he really wants to do is spend time with you.



We have addressed this before, but it bears repeating. This is not some sort of presence of a king in a city. Some years ago we were all talking about Will and Kate's wedding. Three years go we noted that their infant son had been all the rage on the Interweb, with people oohing and aahing over his every little gesture. The family has been met by massive crowds of adoring folks as they made a triumphant tour of Australia and other former elements of the British Empire.

But William and Kate could probably tell you the names of almost none of the folks in those crowds. Those people will remember the day they saw the Prince his bride and their little princeling, but the royals will not remember them as individuals who were there. This is not what it means to be in the presence of Christ. Jesus reigns, he wields the power, the creative power, of heaven now. He literally can make time for you. And he does. His presence is personal, individual, emblazoned on his memory. We hold that wafer up at the Eucharist and do it "for the remembrance of him." We often think that is us remembering, but it can also be understood as him remembering us.

Today we will proclaim the Jesus who walks with all of you out the doors of church and into the workaday worlds you inhabit. If there are a hundred of you here today, that is not 1/100th of Jesus you get, but all of him. He is indivisible. It is a miracle and defies the miserably small world of physics, but he is good at those.

Perhaps we just need to be simple about this: Jesus has risen from the dead so he can spend today with you.

Collect of Day

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God raised up a whole fallen world. The gift of Christ on the cross was not to our souls alone or even to the Christians alone, it was to the whole world. Every sinner, every sin, every broken, dying person and the whole world are objects of his love and care expressed in that cross. Lutherans have a wonderful doctrine of vocation that gets worked in here. The man who is outside washing his car, napping on the couch, playing with his children, or at some office or factory getting his work done is serving God too. He has redeemed the whole world, all of its parts, in the blood of Jesus, it all has been raised up in the resurrection of Jesus, not just us, but the whole world.

Having been rescued from the perils of everlasting death, we ask for perpetual gladness and eternal joys. Are these synonyms or different things? Is gladness what we have now and is joy looking ahead to the future? What would perpetual gladness look like? How would we describe it? Some have critiqued the whole notion of heaven as being absurd because the human being needs to suffer, needs stress, in order to grow. One biology professor I know discounts the idea because he cannot imagine life without death. Others believe that an eternity without stress and disappointments, will lead to indolence, sloth, and a lack of ambition. They seem to envision a heaven which is populated by people perpetually overdosed on Valium or Zoloft. This seems to me to be a fundamental failure of imagination. Science sometimes lives in a pathetically small world. It does truly important things in helping us understand the world around us, but those who insist that it is the sum total of knowledge really do live in a tiny little universe sometimes.

This prayer is imagining a whole different world in which these limitations of our experience are not true. But how do we describe heaven and its joy meaningfully? Should we even try? We pray for it, but do we really know what we are praying for? Does it not defy our imagination? I firmly believe this is why we dare not relinquish a serious reading of the creation story. It challenges us to imagine a perfect world before the fall. And if we can imagine that world, we have the spiritual imagination to hear and believe the promise of the next.

This also points perhaps to a challenge to our self-perception. Does eternal joy not require the greatest change to take place in our own minds and in our own hearts? It may be true that the person that I am right now cannot live without sadness and stress. But God is not going to raise that sort of a person from the grave, at least not and leave them thus. I will be tremendously transformed so that in heaven, without the goad of sadness or the pinch of need, I will continue to be productive, continue to be curious, and loving, I just won't need suffering to goad me along. It is a failure of imagination which looks at heaven as boring or without impetus for doing anything. It is a failure to imagine what God can do which makes heaven boring for so many folks.

Readings

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “*Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.*” ¹⁵ *For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.* ¹⁶ *But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:*

¹⁷ “*And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;*

¹⁸ *even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*

¹⁹ *And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;*

²⁰ *the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.*

²¹ *And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’*

²² “*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—*

²³ *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.* ²⁴ *God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.* ²⁵ *For David says concerning him,*

“*I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;*

²⁶ *therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;*

my flesh also will dwell in hope.

²⁷ *For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.*

²⁸ *You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'*

²⁹ *“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.*

³³ *Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*

³⁴ *For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,*

“The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

³⁵ *until I make your enemies your footstool.”’*

³⁶ *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

³⁷ *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”*

⁴¹ *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

One of the recipients sent this to me today: I'm preaching on the lessons from Acts through the Easter season. This week, I'm keying in on Peter's words, “save yourselves from this corrupt (or crooked) generation.” Some questions that your group might enjoy discussing:

1. *What was particularly corrupt about their generation? While we are each corrupted differently, the people living at the time of the Roman Empire was sick one way, we are sick in other ways, the fact that every generation from Adam onwards has been subjected to death. Corruption in this sense may well have a different technical sense than morality – it might mean that all of us will rot in a grave. We are born (generated) into a life which ends in death (corruption). This may not be entirely a statement about the morality or degeneracy of the people of the first century compared to others. It may be a way of speaking of humanity of every age. We are all of the corrupt offspring of Adam. That said, the Roman Empire was not noted for its moral rectitude either. The Greek word is “Skolia” from which we get the term scoliosis, which is a crooked back.*
2. *How were they and how are we supposed to “save yourselves”? Does this touch on works righteousness? Really? I’m supposed to save myself? Does the questioner assume that this “save” is equivalent to “salvation”? Is this really just good preaching? Yes, the preacher exhorts us – Moses told us to choose life and not death, but doesn’t every sermon need to exhort as well? When the people had asked earlier, Peter had exhorted them to repent and be baptized. The Greek may in fact be at issue. The “sothete” of the text is a passive. About half the translations use “save yourself” a possible rendering, another half use “be saved” which is another possible rendering of the text.*

This is perhaps the profound mystery of all this. For almost any of us the moment of faith feels like something we do, a decision we reach, a thing we do. Theologically speaking, we of course ascribe this to God, but as he acts through His Spirit, that is often so gentle that we can feel like we are doing it. Consider also a baptism. If the preacher doesn’t speak the words and splash the water, if the parents don’t bring the child, if there is no water from the Altar Guild member’s service to the parish, no baptism, presumably its blessings are not bestowed. And yet, we say God does it all in baptism. He saves. Peter’s exhortation cannot be read as a contradiction of God’s action in salvation; it is just good preaching.

Lutheran Study Bibles avoid commenting on this verse, although the LSB in the notes says, “be saved.” NKJV and NASB also have “be saved.”

The sermons of Acts always stun me a little. I am amazed when I read this that the proclamation of the Resurrection is in fact an occasion for fear. Of course I can see why, Peter is telling them that they have killed the long expected Messiah! Now Jesus is back and he is looking for them. It almost could belong in a bad Zombie movie. They have taken their best shot at him and it was not good enough!

And of course, the resurrection is not only about the one they have killed coming back, but it also is a testimony to the fact that they have a very significant God problem. God has made him both Lord and Christ (Messiah/anointed). For the Jewish hearers of this text, this was a radical “re-reading” of the Old Testament. It would take Paul over a decade to really sort all this out after

his Damascus road event. That God would come in the flesh and save the whole world through such a mechanism must have seemed mighty strange to them, as indeed it continues to sound incomprehensible and blasphemous to Muslims today. Here is the scandal of the cross. That God would justify through injustice and bring to life through death.

Yet it says that they were cut to the heart. “Brothers, what shall we do?” Now, we have to give the Spirit some credit here. He has created a situation with the wind and the tongues of flame in which the disciples are pretty convincing witnesses to the fact that something is going on. When Peter invites the folks to join with him in this gift of the Spirit, 3,000 will say “Yes.” That is a pretty amazing sermon. Can you imagine your congregation growing by 1000% next Sunday? (We think that the believers numbered in the low hundreds when Peter started the sermon.) Do you believe God could do that this Sunday? Does it ever fill you with a little trepidation that He might? If I am pretty sure he won’t and make no provision for his work, is it really any wonder that he doesn’t?

What are we to make of this? Of course, we don’t want make this description of what happened into a prescription of what is supposed to happen when the Word is preached. After all, simple experience preaching has given me reason to doubt that most of us will see this sort of an event. But what are we to make of this incredible growth in this text? There are a couple of things I think we want to say. The Jesus to whom the crowds flocked in Galilee has not left. He is still gathering folks. I used to know a missionary who participated in 6000 baptisms one summer in New Guinea. I know a fellow who did several hundred on Sunday in India. It does happen. And perhaps we need to note that Christianity, which is growing around the world, needs 100,000 people per day to come to faith in order to maintain its numbers. Growth means even more than that are confessing Christ for the first time today. (About 36 million Christians die every year – that is about 100,000/day). Even today Christianity is growing wildly throughout the global south. He is doing it through his Spirit, but this is the work of the same Jesus we got to know in the Gospels who fed the thousands and who healed the sick.

Is some of our North American ennui really due to the fact we are dull to God, rendered unfeeling by our surplus of things and enlightenment sensibilities? We have told our children that they can be whatever they want to be, but we have never questioned the fact that as fallen human beings, their desires are fundamentally disordered. Are we unable to be afraid of God like these folks are afraid in today’s lesson? Can we be afraid of Jesus in that way? Their fear was the beginning of a real wisdom as they sought the mercy of God and received it. That sounds rather biblical, doesn’t it? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Psalm 116: 1-14

I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because he inclined his ear to me,

therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD:
“O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”

⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

⁶ The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸ For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;

⁹ I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁰ I believed, even when I spoke:
“I am greatly afflicted”;

¹¹ I said in my alarm,
“All mankind are liars.”

¹² What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.

This is a marvelous Easter psalm and worthy of a few sermons itself. Verse seven really is the launching point of Augustine’s Confessions, a book which you really need to read carefully if you have not done so before. Augustine opens it with the beautiful line, “My soul is restless until it finds rest in You.” The rest of the book will detail that restless soul finally coming to rest in God alone. It is a devotional classic, essentially creating the genre of autobiography at the same time.

Some of us may be used to singing the last few verses as an alternative post-communion canticle as well.

The whole psalm can be really beautifully read as the hymn of praise of the person in the post-Easter state. Our great enemy, death, has been undone. Our God has heard our pitiable cry, sent his Son Jesus to conquer the implacable foe, and now we stand on the other side of that titanic

struggle, victorious in Christ. Our God is merciful and now our lives are pledged to his praise as long as we draw breath and of course that is an eternity since even death cannot hold us now.

I Peter 1:17-25

¹³ *Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

¹⁷ *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

²² *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for*

“All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

²⁵ *but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Peter builds on last week's declaration – we are a people whose hope is built on a rock solid foundation. But he also seems to be talking to the thousands who asked him at the end of that Pentecost sermon, “What shall we do?” They were afraid and he starts here with the fear of God.

Peter asserts that God reveals us as heirs on the last day because we are washed in the blood of the lamb, His Son given for us, and we are born into a new life. That will be a revelation fully seen on the last day, but it is also reality right now, perhaps somewhat hidden, but still here right now. This new life is a real life, not an imagined or sham life, but a real life with deeds to do, enemies to conquer, and brothers to love. God has declared us to be His precious children in the death and resurrection of Christ. We may call him Father. The hope of the Christian shows up in our love for one another. That is an act of hope, acknowledging that it is hard to love the brother, but we also know that Christ has declared the brother to be his child as well. Gone are the recriminations and grudges, the score settling and all the crud of the old way of life. The greatest detriment to evangelism is not the apathy of the people, but the scandalous way that

Christians often treat one another. We are a welcoming, evangelical place when we love one another. It is good to be in the presence of Christ. The world should be able to see that.

The church that is serious about Christ's command to make disciples through baptism and teaching simply must be serious about its relationships with one another. One cannot see the visitor or the guest as a potential source of income or a statistic to be counted, but as a person whom you are welcoming into your family, a place where love and grace from God are lived out among us. This is a difficult and delicate balance sometimes. We love our fellow congregants and sometimes we can love them so much we don't have room for anyone else. Or, we can be so focused on bringing in someone new that we ignore the relationship with the fellow congregant. But in truth, healthy relationships inside a parish are incredibly evangelistic.

I know a man who served a large congregation in rural California, about 600 members. It had been 600 members for decades and yet every year he baptized, confirmed and welcomed new members. But every year at the end of the year it was still the same number. He consulted with this lay leadership and they all bought into an idea. They shut down all the committees and all other work, including evangelism, for 12 months and only focused on the fellowship of the parish, how they loved one another. At the end of the 12 months, the congregation numbered over 1200 people, despite no evangelism effort.

God has remade us in the image of Christ. He has laid his life down for us on the cross; he has loved with a holy and beautiful love. That love, that message preached to us, now shapes and changes our lives. This is not an odious thing, the preacher does not proclaim a scold today, but he empowers a wholly new thing and a holy new thing for the sinner, a new way of life which is not lived in the old ways of retribution and hatred, but is lived in the blessings of God's love. And this is a really good thing to do and a very pleasant road to walk as well.

Peter is genuinely excited for his persecuted audience. In them and their lives of love and service, he expects to see something beautiful blossom because they are the people of the holy and loving God.

The good news of this text is that the good word which God has spoken, the word of our ransom, inheritance, and redemption, that word will stand forever. The other words, the words of this world which would name me sinner, middle aged, weak, and finally corpse, those words are grass. They pass away. Eventually, on the last day, they will all be swept away, and all that will remain will be God's description of who I am and for what purpose he has redeemed me. That I may love!

The preacher of this text – and there is a sermon idea down below for this text – will have to notice the interpretational and hermeneutical struggle which is going on in these lines. Our language really fails us at this point and it shows up in our lives. Peter uses a great deal of the language of necessity and consequence in here. It is perfectly natural for the fallen human being to come to this text and see within it a relationship with God in which we do things and God

rewards those deeds. Peter seems to be talking that way at some points and many hear him saying this.

On the other hand, Peter keeps coming back to the themes of rebirth, God's eternal call to us, the fact that Jesus has ransomed us from the slavery to sin and the futile ways of our forefathers. These are realities which are true of us regardless of what we have done. We are firmly in the conversation of Christian obedience which is a tricky place for us to be. It is so easy for us to slip into the old language in which God is reacting to our efforts. This was what Luther and the reformers of the 16th century could not abide. I would recommend before you preach this sermon that you return to Augsburg Confession VI and XX along with the Apology on these matters. You might also find very helpful the Formula of Concord's discussion of the righteousness of faith and good works in Articles III and IV. There is a way to do this and not preach a form of works righteousness. It means we have to use the word "necessary" very carefully. The necessity of good works is not in order that we achieve something but because we are made new in Christ. The new person simply must do this because it is their very nature. Lutherans have often been so frightened of messing this up we have simply stopped short at preaching objective justification and been altogether silent on this new obedience. But Peter is certainly not silent and interestingly enough, neither was C. F. W. Walther. When you read his sermons there is a great deal of sanctification in there.

This is a very necessary sermon for our generation, but it is also a sermon which traverses a path which many have walked before us. Use their wisdom because they have been burned by the failure to exercise care here.

Luke 24:13-35

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ 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 happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." ²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And

beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

³⁶ *As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”*

Two disciples on the road to Emmaus on that first Easter evening are met by Jesus who falls in with them. There is a great sermon in what he does in this story. He walks with them, he opens their minds to understand, he stays with them, he eats with them, he is revealed in the breaking of bread. He sets their hearts on fire and speeds their feet with a Gospel message to tell – we have seen the risen Lord.



Notice how Jesus acts today. He does not beat them over the head and tell them what to believe, but he first listens to them. He asks them what they think of things. When their account is negative and confused, then he confronts them with truth and a recasting of these events. We tend to come in either too heavy handed and don't listen, or we listen and are so patient that we never confront the error with the truth. Jesus masterfully does them both here.

So we would proclaim this day the presence of Christ in the lives of our hearers. But that then prompts a question for the preacher. What are the things which blind us to the presence of Christ? Was that Jesus purposefully blinding these men or were their eyes kept from seeing Jesus because something in themselves? Was this like the time you met a friend but they were in such a strange, unexpected place that you simply could not remember who they were? Rather like meeting your doctor at the grocery store and you have a vague idea you should know who this guy is but cannot figure out who it is? Are their minds just so clouded by the events of the past days, distracted to the point that they simply cannot see?

What is the Emmaus experience for the person today? What would change in their lives if they had it?

A story of an Emmaus experience – I remember a time when my parish lost three important families in a span of two months. They were transferred to other states. This was a tiny parish, we had about 45 folks in church on a given Sunday. These were the officers and leaders of the parish. I remember being really worried about that until one day while walking from the office to my home I put my foot on a man-hole cover and a voice inside my head simply said “By grace are you saved, through faith, not by works.” I can still see my foot on that cover and hearing those words and the feeling of my fears and worries evaporating. It was an Emmaus moment of sorts. I really believe Jesus called that verse to my mind at that moment.

Have you ever been depressed? When you read the Bible like that, the whole Bible seems like law. One man recollects that suddenly “I will praise God in all situations” was suddenly put into his head. That was the turning point, the depression would dog him for some time afterwards, but the progress began from that moment.

Another remembers his stubborn old German congregation who had incurred a debt to build a new building. They did not like debt, and it caused much conflict. Their Emmaus moment came when someone paid the debt.

Often when we are immersed in the drama of life, it is the Word of God which pulls us out of that. Christ’s voice speaks and our hearts burn within us. It is often afterwards, when we finally can sit down and rest for a moment, that we can look back and see that Jesus was there all along. We don’t recognize him right away, but his Word has a way of being the game changer in this. The two disciples were weary, but their transformation did not come in the revelation of Christ at the meal, but in the burning hearts at the Bible study Jesus conducted.

This is a dear story for the people of God. The classic Lenten hymn, “Abide with Me” and others build on this story. The idea is that the person we meet, who sits down at our table, that one might be Jesus to me. Jesus takes up residence in our lives, he does not leave us wondering and wandering, but he encounters us on the way, on the road which is life. He walks with us and opens our minds and our hearts and sets them on holy fire.

He stays with us, is found in the simplest of things and the most beautiful. Our eyes are opened and we are given a message to tell of his work in our lives, work he often was doing without us realizing it. Can you look back on your life and say that you can see the good work of Jesus in there. I can, I am sure you can too.

The preacher on this day wants to proclaim the presence of the risen Christ. That presence manifests sacramentally in the proclaimed Word and the Sacraments by which he touches us, but also, in the words of Peter, and these disciples who race back to their friends, in the community which we know and love. God is not distant in this text, he is right here, he loves us today. Jesus has risen from the dead. The rest of the world has forgotten the nice little Easter greeting and moved on. Perhaps with the world we are anticipating the secular festivals of Mother’s Day and

Memorial Day. But the Christian today is delighting in a miracle which the world does not realize. Jesus is here. He is here to do good things for us.

Law

1. Sin divides people, it makes us lonely, angry, bitter, afraid, all sorts of negative things. These in turn bear lots of terrible fruit in our lives – dissension, fighting, competitive, and more.
2. This dissension is a great disincentive for people to come to Church and meet the solution to the problem – that would be Jesus.
3. This dissension also saps a tremendous amount of energy out of people, congregations, even the Synod. Just look at LCMS history since the great theological dissension of the 1970's. It is a consistent contraction – one can argue that it was already starting, but the dissension has done little to fix the problem.
4. We ourselves often don't understand the problem, even when we are in the middle of it, because often we are the problem.
5. As a result, we often are found walking a lonely road – perhaps grieving, perhaps angry, perhaps without hope.
6. But this way of life, this loneliness does not belong to the life God intended us to live. It is in fact another sign of our profound brokenness – God had meant us to live in community, to love one another.

Gospel

1. Jesus knows we are part of the problem, that is why he did not wait for us to figure this out, but came searching for us on the lonely paths of Emmaus and other places.
2. He radically reorganizes our minds and our lives. The most important thing about what anyone else has done to me is that Jesus has died for it, even more important than how much it hurt me. I can love anyone now because Jesus has loved me.
3. We find that the road suddenly gets much cheerier when Jesus shows up. The miles pass and soon we are at the door of where we are supposed to be, asking him to come in with us.
4. Jesus reveals himself in the mundane. I will most likely not see the glorious visage of my returning Lord today, but I will see the loving face of my spouse, my pastor, my children, my friend, etc. through these people, through the sacraments I consume, through the word preached, Jesus is also revealed to us today.

5. Jesus' gift restores the lost enthusiasm and focuses our congregations on why we are here and what we are here to do. The disciples run back the same road they had been trudging on a few moments before so they may simply tell.
6. Jesus' love, shaping our community and this congregation, empowers a beautiful life and a beautiful witness to this community.

Sermon ideas:

1. Stay with us Lord for it is evening. (Gospel Reading: That the Resurrected Christ would open the heart and mind of the hearer to his presence, bestowing his blessings of insight, passion, joy, and infectious enthusiasm.)

I heard a wise man say that being a Christian, being in the presence of Christ, is a good thing. He thought that the world should be able to notice that about the Christians. Our lives really should reflect that more. Being judgmental or otherwise known as a crab is really a poor reflection of the one in whose presence I live every day.

This sermon really wants the hearers to rejoice in and see the presence of Christ and the fruit he brings to them. The Emmaus disciples will be our models, our archetypes. These disciples start out in this text jaded and cynical. They are discouraged and have abandoned hope. They had hoped in Jesus – that past tense is so troubling. Jesus shows up in their journey to encourage and recast their experiences in light of Scripture. The same Jesus who encountered them on the road encounters us on the road which we call life. Is our blindness because we are lost in the drama of life? Do we fail to see Christ who comes beside us because we have gotten concerned about really important things but lost sight of the even more important one who stands in and with those things?

We want to notice what he does to these disciples and notice that he continues to do these same things to us. Our world casts us down and saddens us. Depressed people are usually depressed about genuinely sad things. Discouraged people are discouraged because something really bad has happened. The sadness and discouragement are not inappropriate reactions to bad things. These men had good reason to be sad, but they also had not seen the whole picture. Jesus showed up to help them see it. Jesus comes first to reshape our world and point us to his gracious work. There is a very good chance we don't even recognize him when he does this. We are after all a little blinded by our sin. It is hard to see through tears sometimes. Jesus' vision, however, is acute. He sees you, he sees your problems.

But it is when we get inside the house, when he sits at table with us that things get really interesting. He is a gentle soul, he makes as if he would go one, but we invite him in. He does not beat the door down and force his way in, but delights in our invitation. Along the way we have not noticed his hands. It is twilight and we are not entirely clear in our vision, as we said. But when we sit down, and grabs that loaf, blesses it with the same blessing he spoke in an upper room the night of his betrayal, the Jewish table prayer, we

see the holes in his hands. Our eyes are opened to us, we did not open them, He did that. We rejoice! And he fades, not leaving us, but demanding that we believe him here. Is Jesus a sort of faith therapist – like a physical therapist strengthens our body, he forces those faith muscles to stretch. The fact that my eyes are not seeing him as those disciples did on the road simply means that He is stretching and strengthening my faith.

How our hearts burned within us when he opened the scriptures to us. How we rejoiced to take that bread from his hand. And now, that same joy gives life to our weary feet and puts a message on our lips. We rush to those whom we love, and we cannot but tell this story. This is marvelously holistic. This is emotional, physical, educational, intellectual, etc. Jesus is a holistic therapist!

Look at what Jesus has done for them. They were sad, trudging along, spent from all the events of this past week. He has recast their world, he has given them a glimpse of himself, he has moved them, motivated them and sent them out the door with a mission and message. Jesus does this in simple things. He walks with them, talks with them, he stays with them, eats with them. None of this is particularly amazing in itself, except of course that a few days before he had been dead. But we also are given to walk with, eat with, and talk with one another. That same Jesus often uses these moments, having united himself to us in the Eucharist, to comfort and help us.

Through our fellow Christians, Jesus walks with us, comes into our homes, and break bread at our table. He loves to hear your invitation – and he honors it. Shall we remain in our grief or sorrow? He would lead us through his Word and feed us with the bread of life that gives us joy and hope. This is for the whole of life. With these disciples we need also to invite him into our homes. With the folks in Jerusalem who heard Peter we need to say, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

2. Reborn (Epistle Reading: That the Spirit of God would cause the new life which Christ has created to blossom and flower in the lives of the hearers)

This sermon really wants the hearer to believe that the risen Christ has risen to give them a new life right now, not only a future reality in heaven, but a current reality. This is a sermon which might feel uncomfortable to a Lutheran of a certain pietistic stripe, who has grown up reminding himself daily of his sinfulness and unworthiness. It is not a denial of who we are, but it is also asking the hearer to believe and trust what God has said and what God has made us. God is indeed gracious and he does bestow gifts, and one of those gifts really is a holiness in Christ, a perfect righteousness which finds expression in our lives. You want to talk about that perfect life which Christ has lived and which he has right now given to you too in your baptism.

On the sinner and saint tension, Peter wants us to think about the saint part today. And that is not only to talk about it forensically, as if the judge has declared the guilty man innocent, but in a sense of participation with Christ. He has died our death, and now we

get to rise with him. He has united himself to us and that has an effect in our lives today. Freed from the futile ways of thinking of our forefathers, we do things differently. We love.

Peter walks the hearer through this process. It starts with the holiness of God – not our innate holiness, but a holiness which God has and gives. This action is clearly Christ's in the middle part of this text. Pay attention carefully to verse 22. This is the clincher for this sermon. The soul, the inner man has been cleansed, but that results in a loving relationship with the neighbor. The inner holiness of God which is ours, shapes our lives with Christ's holy love.

We, being the good Lutherans that we are, will immediately point to our failings. And Peter will remind us of the words of Isaiah. Yes, your flesh is corrupted by sin, but flesh passes away, like grass. God's word, the stuff of your saintliness, that lasts forever.

Some other Sermon Ideas we might develop:

3. Called to Serve in Resurrection Hope (First Lesson – That the Holy Spirit would engender in the hearer the hopeful courage to proclaim God's love to this community)

Peter was only a few weeks out of his disastrous Passion Week denial of Jesus. Our Lord had forgiven him, just as he has forgiven us this morning. Now, Peter, bold and full of the Spirit of God proclaims and 3000 hear and believe. This sermon would really preach against the apathetic or hopeless faith which feels like we are just going through the motions of Christianity to no effect. This sermon would seek to engender the Christian life, the worship, the service, the relationships with the sense of the sacred. Peter simply told what he had seen and God used his words to change thousands. That same Jesus, with all that same potential is at work in us too.

4. We saw Him in the Breaking of Bread (Gospel – That Jesus would reveal himself to the hearer in the Eucharistic meal this day, calling the Christian to fervent joy and urgent service.)

This is a Eucharistic sermon. We need to preach those and the season of Easter is the perfect time to do that. The Eucharist is an intensely Easter event no matter when we celebrate. It is not the cross which dominates the Eucharistic meal, but the resurrection. It is Sunday thing, not a Friday thing, primarily. Of course, there is no Easter without Good Friday and much of what we say in the Eucharist is acknowledging that, but the culmination of all this is Sunday. The Eucharist unites Christ to the participant, not the dead Christ of Saturday, but the living Christ of Easter morning. That Jesus comes into us through this meal. This sermon then wants to notice that this Jesus who is one with us and one of us, engenders both a holy joy and urgent service. Notice the emotions of the

Emmaus disciples and what they do. After a long walk they are dashing the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell their friends.

Jesus takes a mundane thing like eating together into a truly incarnational, miraculous moment. Those fellowship meals after church, the potlucks, which our children often roll their eyes before they will come, those meals are also moments in which Christ is revealed in the breaking of bread together. Christ is in the relationships we have with one another, promised presence.

5. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Psalm and Gospel – that Jesus would open the minds and hearts of the hearer to see their beloved Christ in their whole Bible.)

The law here is really the rampant and regnant Marcionism which infects North American Christianity. Being a Lutheran we have inherited a marvelous hermeneutic. Jesus is behind every rock on the OT. This sermon will almost be a demonstration of this fact. We will consider carefully those interesting words Luke uses to describe what Jesus did to the disciples on the road. And then we will let Jesus do that to us right now as he takes us into the Psalm, line by line, and shows us his smiling face behind those words.