

Sermon – Luke 24:13-35  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
3 Easter – Year A  
26 April 2020

“Hearts Rekindled With Hope”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

1. This is our seventh straight Sunday of live-streamed worship. Life has acquired new rhythms during these days. I confess that things are mostly good in my life, in our home. I pray the same is true for you. Nevertheless, life is smaller. More confined. Not simply because we are staying home, but because we have let go of so much. In the midst of the grave concerns facing us, we also miss the little things. What do I miss? I miss baseball. For you it might be something else, but I miss the daily patterns inscribed by America's Pastime. This past week I missed baseball enough that I ushered my brood to the basement to watch the commemorative DVD of Kansas City's 2015 championship campaign. As fresh as when it happened five years ago, I delighted to see my boys in blue bring home a World Series title. The drama of that victory, however, arose from the prior year's defeat. The Royals were in the Series in 2014, as well. They pushed the Giants to a decisive seventh game, mounting a ninth-inning rally that fell painfully short, the tying run stranded on third base. While the next year's victory would be all the sweeter, I haven't forgotten what it felt like to watch them lose. So close. Then: nothing. I don't think I'll ever forget that feeling of forsaken emptiness when the game ended, sitting in a sports bar in Ashville, NC, with pastoral colleagues who tried to cheer me up. A year later, the disappointment would make the victory sweeter. In the moment, however, there was no silver lining. Only loss.

2. Two things: First, yes, I know it's just a game. I don't mean to compare the result of a baseball game to anything more serious. But second, I do think it's important to give ourselves both the space and the grace to acknowledge the many types of losses we're experiencing during the pandemic. The point this morning, however, is a simple one: A happy, eucatastrophic ending might be made all the sweeter for the sorrow overcome, but that does not mean the sorrow wasn't real. In the midst of sorrow, one does not know that it will necessarily be overcome. The pain of the journey is real, even if the destination is worth it.
  
3. This is the frame of mind in which I encountered the gospel reading for today, as beautiful as it is familiar. Luke brings us back to the first Easter and onto the road to Emmaus. The story follows the pattern of Christian worship, both ancient and contemporary. The believers gather, they are instructed in the Word, they share a meal, and they are sent for mission. A story that begins in grief, hopes dashed, ends with joy rekindled and purpose discovered. As Jesus, hitherto unrecognized by Cleopas and his friend, breaks the bread, their eyes are opened. Grief evaporates. Despair dissipates. Christ is alive, both host and meal at the feast of life. Alleluia!
  
4. I have to tell you, though, that I feel like the runner's still stranded on third base. That I'm still walking the sad road to Emmaus. It's not that I don't feel Easter joy. I certainly haven't abandoned hope. But we're not *there* yet. Stay-at-home guidelines have been extended, and rightly so. Death continues to stalk our nation, our community, our church. We continue to not be together. And I don't know how long it will last, how far we'll have to walk along this road. Six feet and a million miles apart from one another. I want to see the end of the tunnel, the banquet set. I want to see your faces. I want to see Jesus. But like Cleopas and his friend, I can't. Not all the time. Not even when he's right next to me.

5. The preacher and scholar Matt Skinner writes: “Community is one of the things that makes life worth living, one of the things that can help us come into the fullness of who we are, and one of the things that usually makes life’s hardest passages a little easier. The pandemic has taken it from us. Or, more accurately, our experience of community has been altered. Community still exists, but sensory deprivation is the price we pay.” Cleopas and the other disciple suffer sensory deprivation as they walk the seven miles to Emmaus, not able to see Jesus or fully understand what he says to them. They don’t yet know that there is good news waiting for them, can’t yet imagine that they will soon celebrate a resurrection eucharist. They walk in darkness with heavy, plodding steps.
6. But Jesus walks with them. This passage would usually pull me toward preaching the opening of the eyes, the eating of the feast, the joy after the sorrow. But not today. It’s still there, but today we take comfort in the fact that the risen Christ walks with us before we can see him. Our hopes are in the past tense, but Jesus is present. The feast is in the future, but Jesus is present. We don’t know how long this road will last, but Jesus is present. Jesus is present not simply at the end of the road, at the overturning of our grief and sorrow. He is present with us as we walk, in real time, in uncertainty and anxiety, in worry and sorrow. Jesus is present, and he doesn’t leave us where we are.
7. There is a destination. There will be a feast, both around this table and in the Kingdom yet to come. We will gather together again – face to face, heart to heart, hand to hand, can you imagine? – and Jesus will seat us at the table, unveil our eyes, and give himself to us in bread and wine. Alleluia! But Jesus is with us now, too. Teaching us. Loving us. Warming our hearts. Showing us how we can warm and enliven the hearts of those around us. This One whom you crucified has ransomed you for the futile ways of sin and death. It’s okay if you can’t yet see Jesus. *Jesus sees you.* Jesus walks with you. The pain that

precedes joy is real. Hard. True. But it is not something you face alone. Jesus walks with you. Peter preached on Pentecost that the promise is for you, for your children for those who are far off. The promise is for you. The Christ is with you. Don't rush past your grief, or the suffering of our world. Walk with it as Jesus walks with you. We'll get where we're going in due time. In God's time. And the banquet will be ready; the Lamb's feast will begin. Today, let the fire of hope burn in your heart. We're not there yet, but we will be. Christ has promised. Christ is with us. And that is enough. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***