

SERMON – APRIL 26, 2020

Easter 3A Luke 3 24:13-35 “On the Road to Life”

Dear fellow redeemed, Christ is risen! You may not have ever visited the Holy Land, but you’ve all been on the road to Emmaus, like those two disciples on that first Easter night.

Maybe you are on that road now. It is the road of disappointment and dashed hopes; the pathway of fear and uncertainty; when your mind is filled with more questions than there are answers. It is a hard place to be.

Sometimes, we travel that road with our **everyday lives**. From childhood we develop hopes and dreams, don’t we? We are excited about life and make plans about we’re going to do when we grow up and the positive influence we’d have.

We dream about a house, a spouse, and children, and hope to live happily ever after.

And then we find ourselves on the road to Emmaus.

Things didn’t work out quite as planned. It wasn’t as easy as we thought. People we thought would help us instead worked against us. There is sadness and death.

And so instead of skipping along the road like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, we are shuffling down the road, heavily laden, and wondering about, and perhaps even despairing of, life.

We can also get on the road to Emmaus in our **spiritual lives**. As new Christians we are excited about the faith.

We want to tell others about our Savior.

We look forward to learning about the Word and growing and making a difference. But then our friends aren’t receptive, they become distant, even hostile when we speak about our faith. And so we tend to settle for “going along to get along.”

A congregation is started with great hopes and dreams. . . . ***And then we find ourselves on the road to Emmaus.*** Things didn’t go as planned. We find out that faith is hard and that the Church is not full of saintly people, but sinners like us!

One day our faith seems to be growing and the next we are filled with doubts and fears. There is sadness when folks get into disputes and sometimes even leave the Church.

And so instead of skipping along, we are shuffling down the road, heavily laden, and wondering about our faith.

Yes, we’ve all been on the road to Emmaus. You may be on that road now, or maybe you were in the past, or perhaps you will be in the future.

If so, remember that the other unnamed disciple who was walking to Emmaus with Cleopas, ***is you.*** **PAUSE**

Those two disciples, walking to Emmaus that night, had one thing on their minds: **the cross**. They looked back at what had happened on Good Friday, and compared that to what they had been hoping for, and they came to this conclusion: **the cross ruined everything!**

If it hadn’t been for the cross, things would have been great.

At times, when crosses come into our lives, Satan tempts us to think that way.

When our hopes and dreams meet the detours of trials, failures, rejection and suffering.

When Pandemics suddenly pull the rug out from out beneath us and we wonder about the future and it seems like no one is in control. We wonder if God sees, or knows, or even cares.

When we look at what has happened, and compare that to what we had been hoping for, Satan can use that difference to tempt us to believe that: **God ruined everything!**

These crosses are not what I wanted. If only God would take them away, or mind His own business, or do what I want Him to do, ***things would be great!***

But God loves you too much to indulge your sin, your idolatry, and raise spoiled

children.

And so, Jesus came to those two doubting and disappointed disciples, and showed them how the cross was not a surprise and was not an example of life spinning out of control – **but that the cross was necessary.**

His death was necessary. Not to shatter hope, but to give hope.

He showed them that the cross was not the defeat that it appeared to be, but was part of God's plan of victory over sin, death, and the devil.

That plan that God had been speaking of and accomplishing all through the Old Testament. That plan completed by Jesus' resurrection that first Easter morning. **PAUSE**

The disciples listened to the stranger's words, and as they did so, their hearts were burning within them.

But they didn't quite get it. Like us, they were thick-headed and slow-hearted. Because when you're on that road, when you're in the thick of the struggle, it's easy to hear the words of God, but hard to believe them.

Why? Well, it's because things look and feel and seem so bad. So contrary to what we'd expect. But the problem isn't with God's plan, but with our expectations.

Jesus clearly states that "**in this world we will have much trouble**, but hearkens us to "**take heart, for I have overcome the world.**"

And so, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus teaches those disciples and unpacks the Word of God.

In our reading from Acts, Peter does the same to those listening to him preach.

Why? So that instead of condemning God and turning to ourselves, we would condemn ourselves and turn to God. **That is repentance.**

And that instead of relying on our own wisdom and expectations, we would rely on Him and His Word. **And that is faith.** Only in repentance and faith do we have True, Eternal life.

Satan does not want you to have that life, **and so he makes life look like death and death look like life!** To lead us away from our Savior. And he's good at it. He's had lots of practice.

So, he tries to convince us that we don't really want to live as Christians – you're just going to get walked on.

He tries to convince you that the Church robs you of life, rather than giving it to you. He slithers up to you and says, "**You poor thing, you have enough to do without the Church, or the sanctimonious Pastor, adding to your burden.**"

In every instance, Satan makes the road of life look like death. . . . So live it up! Don't let anyone constrain you. Be all that you can be and get what you can – because if you don't, someone else will. . . . But is that life?

An endless chasing after pleasures? Every one for himself, or herself? Is that living?

Think about it: whatever personal goals you reach and no matter worldly pleasures you indulge, it is all going to end in death. Sooner or later.

It is as Peter told us in his Epistle: "**all flesh is like grass and its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls.**" And then what? Then what?

That's why Jesus came, so that we may have true, eternal life. If His cross and the crosses in our lives look backwards and upside down, **it isn't** because God and His ways are backwards, it is **because we are.**

It is because sin has so twisted us and Satan has so misled us that our thinking is

wrong. God's not upside down, we are!

We think we are good and God is bad. We think we know about what we need, and God doesn't.

And you know where that kind of thinking puts us? On the road to Emmaus. The road of disappointment and despair, of fear and uncertainty. The road of death.

But Easter and our Lord's resurrection shows us that God **specializes** in raising the dead! He is not content to let us wallow in fear or to let us die, but He's come to do something about it!

And so, He comes and takes our death-dealing sins, that their guilt be on Him and not on us. He dies our death to destroy the power of death.

He will not let Satan have his way with us, but has come to rescue us. And all this He does through His cross, transforming its shame into glory, and its death into life.

As a result, all who by grace through faith are joined to Him are transformed, made new, raised from death to life, and made partakers of His glory and His life. True life. Eternal life.

In Holy Baptism, we join Jesus in his death and resurrection and are raised from the death of sin to life with Him.

And that is also why our loving and gracious Father uses the cross in our lives. He is not playing games with us and our lives; He is not capricious and arbitrary;

He does not give us crosses just to make us suffer and pay for our sins – after all, Jesus already paid for our sins!

No, He uses crosses to kill us. To kill the sinner in us who wants to go his own way. To kill the sinful stinking-thinking in us. To kill our idolatry and pride, so that He can raise us again to a new life. Why? So that...

That we rely on Him and not ourselves.

That we have His mind and not our own.

That we repent of our sins and receive His life-giving forgiveness. And so be raised, as children of God.

Only then, as the Spirit's guides, directs and enables, will we, like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, see that the cross did not ruin everything, and that the crosses and suffering in our lives does not ruin everything – but that it is necessary, and it is good. **PAUSE**

You know, the Pandemic has caused some 50,000 deaths in the U.S. so far. Many are so afraid that they may be a victim.

But death has no hold over you. Yes, someday, someday, we *will* die physically, yet we will live.

For the life of Christ that we receive now is just the beginning. For as Peter told us, yes **“the grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.”**

And “Word of the Lord” there doesn't just mean the Bible – but the Word made flesh.

The One who lived and died and now lives again, so that in Him, we who live and die may also live again. Forever.

But our story doesn't end there – there's one more thing.

One more thing that (so to speak) sealed the deal for those two troubled disciples: Jesus fed them.

It wasn't just that they recognized Him because they recognized what He was doing – the words and actions.

It was that through this meal, their eyes were opened.

His Word and teaching and life took concrete form in this eating and drinking, and completed His work in them.

And so too in us. For the same risen Lord who baptizes us and joins us to Himself and His death and resurrection, and who forgives our sins and raises us to life, wants also to feed us – and not just with any food, but with His own body and blood.

To give us the faith, forgiveness, and strength that we need for this journey, for this life. He fills our mouths with Himself, that we do not grow weary and lose heart, but receive from Him all that we need.

Receiving Him and His life, until we join Him at the feast the feast of Heaven, which will have no end.

Until then, we go back, like those two disciples – back out into the world, back to our lives – with good news. To love and serve and proclaim the life that has been given to us.

Because there are so many looking for life. So many walking that road to Emmaus, frightened and alone.

So many asking “***What shall we do?***” Perhaps it is through us that Jesus will go to them and give them hope. Maybe through our witness, Jesus will raise them and give them life.

Perhaps it is through us that they will hear what they have never heard before. That like those two disciples on the road, and like Peter, we may proclaim **HE IS RISEN! AMEN.**