



Sunday April 23, 2023
Luke 24:13-35

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompañado

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

On this third Sunday of Easter, we find ourselves traveling a road that's uncomfortably familiar. Every one of us knows this road, regardless of our particular circumstances. We've traveled it. We've lost our way on it. We've left it behind and we've returned to it. The road is the road to Emmaus, and we recognize it by the words we speak when our feet hit its rough and winding way once again – ***But we had hoped.***

But we had hoped the diagnosis wasn't cancer. We had hoped our marriage would get easier. We had hoped our son would come home. We had hoped the depression would lift. We had hoped the procedure would be successful. We had hoped to keep our jobs. We had hoped to carry the baby to term. We had hoped the pandemic would spare our family. We had hoped God would answer yes to our prayer.

The words we speak on the road to Emmaus are words of pain, disappointment, confusion, and longing. They're the words we say when we've come to the end of our hopes – when our expectations have abruptly been shattered, when our cherished dreams are dead, and there's nothing left to do but leave – defeated and done. ***But we had hoped.***

In our Gospel story this week, Cleopas and his unnamed companion say these same words to the stranger who appears alongside them as they walk the seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Easter evening – “*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*”

Jesus – as far as they knew – was dead. The Savior they staked their lives on, the Messiah they thought would change the world, had died the most humiliating and godless death imaginable – and his promises of a new kingdom seem to have fallen short. Even worse, Jesus's tomb is empty, his body is missing, and the women who loved and followed him appear to have lost their minds – with their strange reports of angels, strangers, and a gardener. Things have completely fallen apart. ***But we had hoped for so much more.***

This year, as so many difficult, exhausting, and tragic things continue to confront people I love and God's children around the world, I'm grateful for the honesty of this post-resurrection story. I'm grateful that the journey continues into Easter evening, when hope is possible but not yet realized. I'm grateful that even the road to Emmaus – the road of brokenness, the road of failure – is a sacred road. A road that Jesus walks. A road that honors our deep disappointment, even as it holds out possibilities of hope and revelation.

As I reflect on this week's Gospel, what amazes me is how much the Emmaus story reveals about the heart and character of Jesus. Once again, I'm reminded that Jesus isn't who I assume he is, and not who I necessarily want him to be. And it's from this unexpected place, that I begin to notice things that I'd long overlooked.

I notice a quiet resurrection. I would've thought that a God who suffers such an agonizing and unjust death would come back with a vengeance, determined to announce his triumph from the rooftops, and prove his accusers and killers wrong. But Jesus does no such thing. He makes absolutely no effort to vindicate himself, or to avenge his cruel death.

Instead, on the evening of his greatest victory, the risen Jesus takes a walk. He takes a leisurely stroll on a quiet, out-of-the-way road. And when he notices two of his followers walking ahead of him, he approaches them in a manner so gentle, so understated, and so ordinary, they don't even recognize him.

I've gotta be honest; this isn't what I always want from my resurrected savior. I think part of the dissatisfaction we face on the Emmaus Road is the disappointment of the quiet resurrection. The disappointment of God's



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maddening subtlety and hiddenness. The disappointment of a Jesus who prefers the quiet, hidden encounter to the theatrics that many of us expect and crave.

I also notice the healing that takes place through story. As soon as Jesus begins walking with the companions on the road, he invites them to tell their story – “*What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?*”

Surprised by the question, Cleopas and his companion tell Jesus everything. They share with him the story of their faith – its rise and its fall. They tell Jesus how high their expectations had been for their now-crucified leader. They describe their devastation at his death. Their confusion, their loss, their uncertainty.

And Jesus listens. He hears them and allows them the comfort of articulating the entirety of their story. And then – when they’re done – he tells the story back to them, and as he does, the story changes. As Jesus retells the story, it becomes what it really always was – something far bigger, deeper, older, wiser, and richer than the travelers on the Emmaus Road understood. “*Here’s what you’re leaving out,*” Jesus seems to say. “*Here’s what you’re missing.*”

He helps the travelers comprehend their place in a story that long precedes them, a story big enough to hold onto their disappointment without being defeated by it. When Jesus tells the story, the death of the Messiah finds its place in a narrative of unfathomable redemption, hope, and love. When Jesus tells the story, the hearts of his listeners burn.

For me, experiencing the Emmaus Road always highlights just how small and narrow-minded my own understanding is. I lose all sense of the big picture, failing to place my life in the broader and more expansive context of God’s all-encompassing story. Like Cleopas and his companion, I need Jesus to meet me on the road in order to reshape and enliven my faith.

But we had hoped the story was bigger. We had hoped it would have a better ending. Well, it is. And it does.

Then I notice the freedom to leave. When the travelers reach Emmaus, Jesus gives them the option to continue on without him. In fact, he acts as if he’s leaving, placing them in a position where they have to be intentional about their desire with him. Do they want him to stay? Are they willing to risk hosting a stranger in their home? Do they wish to go deeper with this man who makes their hearts burn, or are they content to leave the encounter where it stands, and return to their ordinary lives without learning more?

I have to admit – I’m always surprised by Jesus’s unwavering commitment to *my* freedom. He doesn’t impose, overpower, or coerce. He will, however, act as if he’s moving on, giving me space, time, and freedom to decide what I really want.

Do I desire to go deeper? Am I ready to get off the road of my failures and defeats? Am I willing to let the guest become my host? And do I really want to know who the stranger is?

“*Stay with us.*” That’s what Cleopas and his companion say to Jesus. *Stay with us.* An invitation. A welcome. The words a patient Jesus waits to hear.

And then...then, I begin to notice the small things. Once Jesus and his companions are seated around the table, Jesus takes bread. He takes, blesses, breaks, and gives. Such a seemingly small thing, and yet such a small thing that changes everything.



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During these exhausting times of division, violence, and fear – hearing story after story of senseless and unnecessary death and suffering, and fearing for our futures as individuals, families, communities, and nations, it's difficult to trust in the transformative power of small things.

But here's where the Emmaus story speaks to this power – the power of the small and the commonplace to reveal God's presence. God shows up during a quiet evening walk on a remote road. God reveals God's self in a bit of bread. A sip of wine. A common table. A shared meal. God shows up in the rhythms and rituals of our seemingly ordinary days.

So what does this mean for you and me right now? It means that God is in the text message you send to the struggling friend. God appears in the livestreamed worship service, the phone call, the greeting card, the held open door. Jesus is the stranger you see across the street when you walk your dog.

The sacred is taking place in the difficult conversation you have with your child, in the hand you hold in the hospital waiting room, in the stand you take against poverty, hunger, injustice – and in the loved one who challenges you to reframe the story of these days in the light of God's inconceivable love.

If the Emmaus story tells us anything, it tells us that our risen Savior isn't deterred by the apparent smallness or insignificance of our everyday lives. Wherever and whenever we make room, Jesus comes.

“But we had hoped.” Yes, we had. Of course, we had. So many things are different than we had hoped they'd be. And yet. The stranger who is our Savior Jesus still meets us on the broken and lonely road to Emmaus. And the guest who becomes our host nourishes us with his presence through Word and Bread.

So, my friends, keep walking. Keep telling the story. Keep honoring the stranger. Keep attending to your burning heart. ***Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!***

He's risen on the road to Emmaus, and he's risen everywhere else. So, look for him. Listen for him. And when he lingers at your door, honoring your freedom, but yearning to feed you, say what he longs to hear – *stay with me*. Thanks be to God! Amen.