

30 April 2017
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“With Us Still”

Text: Luke 24:13-35 (1 Peter 1:17-25)

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

You've been on that road, the road to Emmaus, like those two disciples on that first Easter night. Maybe you're on that road right now. The road of struggle and sadness. The road of disappointment and dashed hopes. The road of fear and an uncertain future. The road where your mind is filled with more questions than there are answers. That road . . . it's a hard place to be.

We get on that road with our **everyday lives**. When we're little we have plans and hopes and dreams. We are excited about life. What I'm going to be when I grow up. A house, a spouse, and children, and happily ever after. The car I'm going to drive, the job and career I'm going to have, the difference I'm going to make in the world. . . . *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 death and disappointment. And so instead of skipping along like we thought we would and dreamed we would, we are shuffling down the road, heavy laden, and wondering about life.

We get on that road also with our **spiritual lives**. As new Christians we are excited about the faith. We want to tell others about our Saviour. We look forward to learning about the Word and growing and making a difference. *And then we find ourselves on the road to Emmaus*. Things didn't work out quite as we thought they would. We find out that faith is hard and that the Church is not full of wonderful 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 the death and disappointment and sadness of folks who leave the Church. And so instead of skipping along like we thought we would, we are shuffling down the road, heavy laden, and wondering about our faith.

You've been on that road, the road to Emmaus. You may be on that road now, or maybe you were in the past, or maybe you will be in the future. Yes, that other disciple, walking to Emmaus with Cleopas, *is you*.

For those two disciples, walking to Emmaus that night, had one thing on their minds: **the cross**. They looked at what had happened, and compared that to what they had been hoping for, and they came to this conclusion: it's over. Done. That cross ruined everything. *Now what?*

We think that too, when the cross comes into our lives. When our hopes and dreams meet the detours of trials and failure and suffering. When sin comes crashing down on us, we make wrong choices, or we become unwilling pawns in someone else's game. We wonder if God sees, or knows, or cares. And we look at what has happened or is happening, and compare that to what we had been hoping for, and we too can come to the conclusion: it's over. Done. Now what?

That's the voice of unbelief. And it can be a rather loud voice, can't it? In our ears, in our minds, in our hearts. And it seems right, and it seems true, and it seems to make sense.

Except for this: *the crosses in our lives are there for our good*. Maybe they're not what we thought would happen, not what we hoped or dreamed would happen, not what we were planning on . . . but what God brings into your life He brings only for good. And the evil that comes upon you in this life? He can use that for good, too. When you're on the road of disappointment, sorrow, sadness, and struggle, that may be hard to believe, but that makes it no less true. The God who created all things good is working good in you, too. Even through crosses.

And so to those two just-like-us disciples, Jesus comes that night. The crucified Jesus. The risen from the dead Jesus. The victorious and triumphant Jesus. But He keeps them from recognizing Him right away. For He has work to do, first. Teaching. About the cross. To teach them that the cross was part of God's good and gracious plan, and from the very beginning. That this happened not for ruin, but for good. Not to shatter hope, but to give hope. Maybe not the way they thought it would be, but better. In ways they could not yet imagine.

So while He walks with them, Jesus opens up for them the Old Testament. Beginning with Moses and then going through all the prophets. And He says: See? God knew this was going to happen. See? God *planned* for this to happen. See? This cross, this death and resurrection, was the plan for good all along.

They listened. Their hearts were burning within them. But, like us so often, they didn't quite get it. Because when you're on that road, when you're in the thick of the struggle, it's easy to hear the words, but it's so hard to believe them. Because things look and feel and seem so bad. Because the voice of unbelief telling us the opposite of all that, seems so right and true and sensible. Because the Word of God seems so contrary to reality! Jesus is dead and buried, not victorious. My life is in tatters, not victorious.

But here's what Easter teaches us; and here's what Jesus needed to teach those disciples on the road to Emmaus: **God specializes in raising the dead.** Satan and unbelief want us to think death is the end; that it's all over, done. That when our plans don't work out, that it's all over, done. That when life's tough, that it's all over, done. But in reality, God is just getting started. Because through death He gives life. Death and resurrection is God's go to pitch, to make us stop relying on ourselves and what we think is and should be, and to start relying on Him and His Word. And to start believing that whatever is happening in my life right now is for my good. Yes, even if it seems the very opposite.

That's your Father's baptismal promise to you. His promise when in that water you were raised from being dead in your trespasses and sins to a new life with Him, He promised that as His child, He would give you only good. Not just what you think is good, but what He knows is good. Sometimes those things are the same, but often they're not. Often they are good struggles, good disappointments, good challenges, good crosses. And while it's hard to believe that sometimes, that's why Jesus opens up the Old Testament to us, and now also the New Testament, and says: See? Struggles where I worked good. See? Disappointments where I worked good. See? Challenges and crosses where I worked good. Do not be unbelieving, but believe. For what I did then for them I am doing now for you.

Their hearts were burning. They wanted Jesus to stay with them. *Did He?* Well, yes and no, perhaps we think. Yes, He stayed a while and had dinner with them, but then no, for then He left. *But did He?* Well, actually, no, He did not leave. Yes, He did stay with them. For, we are told, ***He vanished from their sight.*** And that's quite a different thing than leaving.

And when it happened is instructive, too. It was *while they were at table.* His table, really. For though He was a guest, He took charge. And ***He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.*** Was it the Lord's Supper? Probably not. But the way Luke writes it, he sure wants you to think that way, and make that connection. That to us who are on the road to Emmaus with all its doubts and fears and struggles, we are not alone. Our Lord is with us. Even if we cannot see Him with our eyes, He comes to us in His Word, and is with us. He comes to us at the table, and is with us. He is right here, with us. With us with His good, and with us for our good. To give us life from the dead now, that we might also have life from the dead forever. Because that's His specialty, you know.

Which is good, for your life is as Peter said today: ***All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers and the flower falls . . .*** Or in other words, dying.

So maybe right now you're like the green Spring grass and the beautiful Spring flowers that are bursting out all around us, that make the springtime so many people's favorite

season. And maybe it's also the time of life we like best, when we're young and things are new and the possibilities seem endless. But Spring doesn't last long, does it? Pretty soon the weeds pop up, the heat of summer comes, damaging storms, searing drought. Does God love us in the Spring but not so much in the other? Of course not. ***Stay with us, Lord.*** And He does. Through it all. Because even though ***all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass***, and though ***the grass withers and the flower falls***, Peter then adds this word of comfort: [but] ***the word of the Lord remains forever***. And not just the word that we hear and read, but ***the Word made flesh*** remains forever. The Word that conquered death in His resurrection and who can therefore never die again. The Word who came to and stayed with those disciples and who comes to and stays with all of us on our roads to Emmaus.

And then they saw things in a whole new way. And they took the same road back to the others, to encourage them. And you've been on that road, too. When your eyes have been opened and you've been enabled to see things in a new way. When you've been raised from the death of disappointment and struggle and disbelief and given forgiveness and joy and life. You've been on that road, too. And maybe to help those who are on the road who are still walking the other way and still asking, still wondering, *What shall we do?* Perhaps it is through you that they will hear what they've never heard before. Perhaps it is through you that they will receive hope and life. Perhaps you are the one who will come and stay with them, and through you, Jesus. That in the midst of death, there be life.

For that's Jesus' specialty, you know. To take those who are on the road of sin and death, and give them life. To turn two disciples around from knowing only death to proclaiming ***The Lord has risen, indeed!*** And not just two disciples, but *starting* with them and even to today. 'Cause that's what we say this whole season . . . did you notice? We say their words! We confess that Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] He is alive, and with us, for good. Just as He said.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.