

19 April 2026
Easter 3

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Restoring Hope through the Word”
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.

We had hoped.

We *had* hope.

Now we do not. It's gone. It died on a cross.

So it was for those two men walking, trudging, back to Emmaus. Maybe the longest seven miles of their lives. **Two of them**, Luke says. Two disciples of Jesus. Two who knew Him . . . or thought they did.

We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

We had hoped.

We *had* hope.

Now we do not.

Their hopes are dashed. No, shattered. No, obliterated. The kind of obliteration there's no coming back from. Crushing. Death does that.

You probably know something of that. If it hasn't happened to you, you've probably seen it happen to someone else.

When I was in Seminary, my second year, a fourth year student, Ray, just a couple of months from receiving his call, graduating, and becoming a pastor was killed in a car crash right at the front gate of the Seminary. His fiancée in the car with him survived, but was critically injured. *We had hoped . . .*

Marriages start with great hope and joy and celebration. *Til death us do part*. The hope of children. A future and life together. But how many end too soon? From death, from sin, from selfishness. *We had hoped . . .*

And we could say the same thing about many careers, friendships, churches, dreams . . . The detritus of shattered lives all around us. Bits and pieces of hopes and dreams. No one wants to be the man on the median begging for money. No one wants to be a single mom. No one thinks it will happen to them. *We had hoped . . .*

And we wonder *why*? Why do these things happen? Sometimes there's an answer. Fault. Blame. Sometimes not. Either way, we think, we just have to make the best of it.

But is that the life God wants for you? A life where *you just have to make the best of it*? Trudging, slogging along.

For those two men, trudging back to Emmaus, there was no *best of it* to be had! There was no picking of these pieces. They had to figure out LIFE again. They thought, they hoped . . . Now, they need NEW thoughts and NEW hopes. *But what can compare to this one?* What could replace this one? That the Messiah had come! Nothing else will measure up. Or even come close.

Or so they thought . . .

There was a lot of confusion, too. Compounding things in their rattled brains. The report of the women . . . an empty tomb, a vision of angels . . . But that's what often happens with tragedies or major events. Lots of rumors, stories, reports, many of which later turn out not to be true. We have to wait for the dust to settle. The investigation to take place. Then the truth will come out.

They weren't there yet. Still too much dust in the air. Too much confusion. Too much pain.

We had hoped.

We had hope.

Now we do not.

So Jesus cuts through it all - all the hopelessness and confusion. But not just by appearing to them and giving them a *glimpse* of Him alive - the time for that would come. But *first* giving them something more steadfast and reliable than that.

Something OLD that wasn't like the many and varied reports coming in that may or may not be true. Something that *wouldn't* change because it *couldn't* change. Jesus gives them the Word of God. The Word written long before this that not only said all this was *going* to happen, but that it HAD to happen this way. That it was **necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory**. That He HAD to die and rise from the dead. This was known, as we heard Peter write in his Epistle, from **before the foundation of the world**. And then revealed by God through the prophets. Now it has happened. God did it! Why are you surprised? Why are you dismayed? Why are you not *rejoicing*?

Well, you know why. It's hard! They're conflicted. They *want* to believe, they want to hear more. But once your hopes get shattered, it's hard to hope again. Don't get fooled again! Once bitten, twice shy. So stay with us, stranger. Teach us more. *Renew our hope*.

And Jesus does. But just for a moment. For now that He has revealed Himself to them *in the words of the prophets*, now He reveals Himself to them **in the breaking of the bread**. Not as proof, but as confirmation that the Word of God was true and right all along. So that their faith and hope are firmly anchored not in what they see, but in the Word of God. The Word of God *that will last*. For **the word of the Lord endures forever**.

This we must learn as well. For us, if we see the detritus of shattered lives all around us; bits and pieces of hopes and dreams - even our own! - *why are we surprised?* If we are hurt, if there is pain, if we are sinned against . . . If there is persecution, opposition, evil in the world . . . If we are betrayed, used, shoved aside . . . *Did not the Word of God say this would happen?* Jesus Himself also said so. If they hate me, they will hate you. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. The evil one will try to deceive you and mislead you. He will attack and harass you. He will give you no peace. Jesus himself said so . . . *so why are we surprised when he does?*

Well, maybe it's not so much the *what* as the *who*. When those we thought we could trust, we could rely on, are the ones doing the hurting and betraying. And then realize, I've done it, too! I've hurt, I've betrayed, I've failed, I've sinned against my loved ones, I've done the shattering, too . . .

There's only one who never did. The one who saw the detritus of this world, all the shattered lives, all the broken pieces, who looked around and saw a world *harassed and helpless*, wounded people *like sheep without a shepherd* (Matthew 9:36), and so came to be that shepherd, to pick all up all the shattered pieces, all the dry bones, and *renew our hope*. So that for all the shattering you've done, to say to you *I forgive you*. For your wounded souls, to say to you *I love you*. For the betrayal

you've suffered, to say to you *I will never leave you or forsake you*. To take your shame away from you and make it His. To wash away your uncleanness. And to feed your hungering and thirsting soul with His own Body and Blood. *To restore hope . . .* not just to a broken and fallen world, but to broken and fallen you.

Hope even while we are walking through this world. Or slogging, or trudging. Like those disciples. Jesus didn't immediately reveal Himself to them and make their aching hearts magically go away, and He doesn't make all our troubles magically go away - though that's what we want. But He walked with them and stayed with them and gave them what they needed, though they didn't realize it at the time.

And He does for us, too. **We know what we want, but He knows what we need.** The day will come when Jesus will reveal Himself to our eyes, and we will arrive and feast at His *eternal* table. That day will come, but is not yet. We're still on the journey. And there will be days of pain, and days of joy. There will be days we are strong and days we are weak. Days of happiness and days when the challenges seem too much for us. *Don't be surprised*. It was that way for the patriarch, prophets, and apostles, too. But through it all, they were never alone.

And as a baptized child of God, baptized into Jesus, you *are not* and *will not* be either. You *cannot* be, for Jesus is risen from the dead and has given you His Spirit. Maybe your sin will make you doubt, maybe like those two disciples on the road, Jesus will hide Himself from you for a moment. But He was there all along.

So as Jesus taught those two disciples, don't believe what you see or feel, or the reports coming out of the world that God is irrelevant, or a myth, or dead. You have the Word and truth of the one who said He would die and rise and did so - *for you*. So that we *never* have to say . . .

We had hoped.

We had hope.

Now we do not.

But instead say: *Alleluia! Christ is risen!* **[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]**

And *rejoice!* Rejoice that we are children of God. Even when its hard. For in the midst of an evil and constantly changing and shifting and uncertain world, and people who let us down, and when we let ourselves down, our hope is not here, in this. Our faith and hope and life are in God, the empty tomb, and all His words and promises fulfilled for us by that stranger - *but a stranger no more!* - walking on the road to

Emmaus.

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.