

“JESUS REVEALED”

Luke 24:13-35

Third Sunday of Easter (Series A)

April 30, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Third Sunday of Easter comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 24, verses 13 through 35. It is on page 749 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus reveals himself to two of his disciples. And it just so happens, he uses the exact same means to reveal himself to us. Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From Luke 24, we begin reading at verse 13.

¹³That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹And he said to them, “**What things?**” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²²Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵And he said to them, “**O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?**” ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Pastor, why is every sermon about Jesus?

I don't think any of you have asked that question yet —at least not with those exact words. But perhaps you have wondered about it.

Why is every sermon about Jesus? I mean, we like Jesus and all, but aren't there other things in the Bible too? Aren't there tips about how to have a better marriage or raise well-behaved kids? Why don't we have sermons that focus on how to be better people or just live more fulfilling lives?

Okay; it's true. The Bible does have instructions for parents, and spouses, and children, and all sorts of people. God tells us, quite clearly, what he expects from us. We call it “the Law.” And when Scripture brings up various parts of the Law, we don't shy away from talking about them. But the Law never ends up being the only thing we talk about. Nor does it really end up being the focus of a sermon.

Sometimes we might actually want the Law to have a more prominent place. I think this is because we all experience in our daily lives that we fail to keep the Law. But we want to keep it. So we think there must be some part of it that we're missing, and if we can just find that part we're missing, then we'll be able to keep it.

Most of us who come to church, at least semi-regularly, should have a pretty good idea of the content of God's Law. That is, we know the Ten Commandments. We know what God requires of us. And we know the Ten Commandments can be summarized in just two —love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:35-40). So the commandments end up being quite simple. Then we go and try to do them. But it doesn't always work so well. At best, we find ourselves to have mixed results. And at worst, we find ourselves to be utter failures. If you don't find any failure, it means you are a self-righteous hypocrite, and that is a failure.

So we know the commandments, but we still find ourselves to be failures. So we figure we must be missing something. There must be some tips or tricks that I haven't learned yet. I know what I am supposed to do, and I kind of want to do it, but I don't. I must not really know *how* to keep the Law. So we expect the Law to give us some *how-tos*. We expect the Law to not merely teach us *what* to do, but also *how* to do it. And so we search the Scriptures looking for this next level of the Law —the more complex part that will enable us to keep the simple commandments. But the Law really doesn't have much by way of *how-tos*. It's mostly just *dos* and *don'ts*. And then you either obey or you don't. The Law is really that simple.

But, ironically, we don't really want the Law to be that simple. Because if it is that simple, then it means I'm not actually going to be able to get my sin under control. You see, if there's still some part of the Law that I haven't figured out yet —some *how-to* that I haven't learned—then there's still some hope that I can learn that part and get my sin problem turned around. But if we already have an adequate understanding of the Law, and we haven't gotten our sin under control yet, then there isn't really any hope left for improvement. And that's kind of discouraging. It means things are going to stay, basically, the way they are. The only thing left to do is just try harder. But let's be honest; most of us are never going to do that. And even if we

do, it’s not going to work. It’s not going to make us less sinful. It’s not going to make us more holy. And it’s certainly not going to make us acceptable to God.

Now, we shouldn’t just give up on good works. Not at all. We should all try harder —much, much harder, and for one simple reason: good works are beneficial for your neighbor. That’s all. They do not make us less sinful. They do not make us more holy. They do not improve our nature. And they do not make us acceptable to God. They are beneficial for our neighbors, and that is more than enough to make them important.

In our relationships to our neighbors around us, good works mean everything. But in our relationship to God, they mean nothing —absolutely nothing. We might be able to form some good habits, and this will be beneficial to ourselves and our neighbors, but we will never change our natures. We will never make even the slightest improvement to our natures.

Now, every Christian should know this already. But sometimes we forget, for the simple reason that we don’t want it to be true. We underestimate the seriousness of our sinful condition. We want to think we can improve ourselves. And we just want God to help us out a little.

So we want God to show us how to defeat our enemies —those obstacles that stand in our way. But we don’t realize that our own nature is the enemy. We’re okay with the idea of a Savior or a Redeemer, so long as it’s not our own selves that we need to be saved from or redeemed from.

It’s like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They had hoped Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel (24:21). But when he ended up dead on a Roman cross, they figured he must not be. The whole expectation of the Redeemer of Israel was that he would free them from their oppressors. And the oppressive Roman government, they thought, must be the enemy. In order to redeem Israel, the Messiah must free them from Roman control. But Jesus ended up dead at the hands of the Romans. And not only that, his own chief priests and rulers handed him over (24:20). Instead of redeeming Israel from the enemy, the enemy killed Jesus —or so they thought.

But, in what looked like utter failure, Jesus was, in fact, redeeming Israel. These disciples just didn’t recognize it, because they failed to properly identify the enemy. They thought it was Rome. But it wasn’t. To borrow a line from Pogo, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” That is, it is our own sin; it is our own nature. That is what Jesus redeemed us from, and it took his death to do it.

Now, if our sin is so serious that it required the death of the innocent Son of God, do we really think that we’re going to be able to change our nature simply by trying harder or discovering some secret *how-to*? I mean, if the answer to our problem is found in *how-tos* or a little extra inspiration, then Jesus’ death was unnecessary and way, way overboard —like tearing down a house to get your Frisbee off the roof.

But Jesus was not crucified in vain. His death was exactly what was necessary, because the enemy is us. The wages of our sin is death (Rom. 6:23a). So in order for Jesus to redeem us from the enemy, it was necessary for him to die our death, so that the free gift might be eternal life (Rom. 6:23b). The death of Jesus was the necessary means of redeeming Israel.

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So on that road to Emmaus, Jesus taught these two disciples how it was necessary for the Christ to suffer all these things and enter into his glory (24:26). And notice how he did this. “Beginning with Moses and *all* the Prophets, he interpreted to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (24:27).

It would be so marvelous to have a recording of that conversation. Before these disciples even recognized Jesus, he first revealed himself to them in the Scriptures. And at this point the New Testament hadn’t been written yet. So “the Scriptures” referred simply to the Old Testament. Jesus took these two disciples through a Bible study on how *all* the Old Testament Scriptures testified that he must suffer, die, and rise again.

And we learn from this what we should expect to find when we read the Bible. We should expect to find Jesus ... everywhere. Jesus didn’t just take them through a few select Old Testament prophecies like Micah 5 or Isaiah 53. Jesus used Moses and *all* the prophets, and he interpreted *all* the Scriptures.

Now, it’s not like Jesus recited every single verse from the Old Testament and explained how it referred to him. That would have required a much longer walk. But he taught them that the whole unified purpose of the Old Testament is to testify of Jesus —the Son of God who was coming into the world to suffer and die to redeem God’s people from their sins.

And it would be so marvelous to have a recording of this conversation. Perhaps Jesus talked about the promises made to Adam and Eve, and Abraham, and Jacob, and David, and how all these were fulfilled in him. Maybe he taught them about the near sacrifice of Isaac, and Joseph’s rising from a pit to save the people who betrayed him, and how these patterns pointed forward to his own death and resurrection. In our last hymn we sang about how the crossing of the Red Sea was a shadow of how Jesus would lead God’s people out of their slavery to sin. We know Jesus liked to talk about Jonah, and how he was a pattern of the Christ to come. And Jesus probably taught them about the sacrifices and the worship in the tabernacle and the temple and how these things were just a shadow of himself. And it’s very likely there are many other connections between Jesus and the Old Testament that we have never even noticed.

The whole purpose of the Old Testament is to point forward to Jesus. And if the Old Testament is all about Jesus, then it is even easier to recognize that the New Testament is all about Jesus. The Scriptures —from beginning to end— are all about Jesus. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, we find the story of God redeeming sinful humanity through the gift of his Son.

We search the Scriptures, and we gather together to hear and study God’s Word, because we expect to find the solution to the problems in our lives. And we do! But the solution is not found in tips and tricks. It is not found in *how-tos*. And it is not found in that little bit of extra inspiration that will finally enable us to keep the Law. It is found in Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone —crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins. And that is why every sermon is about Jesus.

So Jesus’ appearance to these two disciples teaches us what to look for in the Scriptures. And it also reflects the pattern of Christian worship. There are two climactic moments in this text. The first one is where the unrecognized Jesus reveals himself through the Scriptures. The

second one is where Jesus reveals himself and is finally recognized in the breaking of the bread. It was in this second climactic moment that the disciples realized Jesus’ presence with them.

And this is just like the pattern of Christian worship. The first part is the “Service of the Word,” where the *truth* of Jesus is manifested in the Scriptures. And the second part is the “Service of the Altar,” where the *presence* of Jesus is manifested in the Sacrament.

That Old Testament Bible study ended when they finally reached Emmaus. And since it was getting dark, these two disciples compelled their new friend to stay the night. At first this stranger had called them “foolish.” But since he so masterfully opened the Scriptures to them, they now welcome him into their home. And as they sit down to dinner, this new friend does something very strange. “He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them” (24:30). Now this is an odd thing to do when you are the guest in someone’s house. It was their house and their bread, but Jesus assumes the role of host. And this action reveals Jesus himself to them.

So did Jesus serve them the Lord’s Supper that night? Is that what the term “the breaking of the bread” refers to? Maybe. There are other places in the New Testament where “the breaking of bread” seems to be a reference to the entire Sacrament (e.g., Acts 2:42). I don’t think we can say for sure, but we can say that Jesus taught them something about the Sacrament. When he took their bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, he brought to mind what he did three nights earlier when he instituted the Lord’s Supper. And it was in this action that their eyes were finally opened and they recognized him.

It reminds me of one of our great communion hymns: “Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face” (*Ambassador Hymnal*, #277). When we eat that bread that Jesus says is his body (22:19), and when we drink that cup that Jesus says is his blood (22:20), we are assured of his presence with us. We receive Jesus himself, and with him, we receive all the blessings of his work on our behalf.

So here’s the gracious truth we find in this passage. We’ve been underestimating our problem. But God didn’t. God knew our problem before he even created the world. And he knew exactly what he would do to fix it. He would take on human flesh and come to be with us. And he came not merely to be with us, but to fix us. He bore the sin of the entire world and suffered the punishment. He defeated Satan, death, and even our own sinful nature. Jesus has met the enemy, and the enemy is us. So he bore the enemy’s punishment in order to redeem the enemy. This was God’s plan from before the foundation of world. And he has been so gracious to reveal it to us in the Scriptures. So we may not find tips, tricks, and *how-tos* in the Scriptures. But we find something better. We find the eternal solution to our problem —Jesus.

We find Jesus where he has promised to be for us. He is revealed in his Word and in his Body and Blood. There we receive Jesus and the cure for our souls. He was crucified and risen for our redemption. His death was a gift to us, and his resurrection is too. These sins that we would like to be done with, we will be done with them —maybe not as soon as we’d like, but his promise as certain as his resurrection from the dead. Just as he is risen and lives and reigns in perfection, so we will too. He will come to raise us from the dead. He will transform our bodies and souls into his perfect image. Then we will live and reign with him in perfect holiness forever and ever. Come quickly Jesus. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.