

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

Luke 24:13-35

Thirds Sunday of Easter (Series A)

April 26, 2020

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. In this gospel lesson, Jesus teaches us how to read the Bible. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 24, beginning at verse 13, we read in Jesus' name.

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then 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?" ¹⁹ And 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, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But 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. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and 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. ²⁴ Some 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." ²⁵ And he said to them, "**O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?**" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but 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. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They 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?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then 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!

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS (Luke 24:13-35)

Why is every sermon about Jesus? Have you ever wondered about that? I hope you've at least noticed that, at our church, Jesus dies in every sermon. And if you've grown up your entire life in the Lutheran tradition, this might seem like the most natural thing in the world. *Of course every sermon is going to be about Jesus.* But if you grew up in a different tradition, or if you've had some exposure to other churches, then you probably know that not every church operates this way.

So 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?

And 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 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, because Jesus teaches us a different way.

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 go 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 an extreme 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 tip or trick that I haven't learned yet. I know what I am supposed to do, and I kind of want to do it, but I just 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 *do not's*. And then you either obey or you don't. The Law really is 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 basically am who I am. 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 take my personal holiness to the next level. But if we already have an adequate understanding of the Law, and we haven't gotten to that next level, then there isn't much hope that we will. And that's kind of discouraging. It means we are going to stay, basically, the way we 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.

Deep down, we're all hoping that the Law isn't really as simple as it seems to be. We're actually hoping there's something we haven't figured out yet, because that would explain why we're not as awesome as we think we should be.

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS (Luke 24:13-35)

And this, I think, is why many Christians want church to be less about Jesus and more about moral improvement. We resist the biblical truth that we are, by nature, sinful and unclean. We are tempted by our sinful flesh to think that our sinful flesh isn't actually the problem. There's just something we haven't mastered yet, and once we figure out what that is, then we'll be good.

But most people actually have a pretty good natural understanding of the Law. Even unbelievers have a pretty good understanding of the Law, because it's written on the heart (Rom. 2:15). And once you learn the Ten Commandments, there really isn't much else to the Law. And whatever else there may be, it's certainly not going to take you much farther than the Ten Commandments. The Law really is quite simple and natural.

But the Gospel—no one has any natural understanding of the Gospel. Suppose all we know about Jesus is that he died on the cross and rose again on the third day, but God never told us why. Would any of us, in a million years, ever think that this somehow forgives our sins? No way! If God had not revealed it to us in words, no one would ever imagine that Jesus' death forgives our sins. And even after God revealed it to us, it still sounds like foolishness to our natural minds (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14). The Law is the part of God's Word we understand and remember. The Gospel is the part we keep forgetting. And, most importantly, the Gospel is the part that delivers salvation to us. So we need both Law and Gospel in our worship—they go together—and the Gospel must be central.

Now I certainly don't want to give you the impression that we should 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 our 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.

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. "We have met the enemy and he is us" (Pogo). 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 on the level of demolishing your 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.

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).

Do you guys know what the Greek word for "all" (*πᾶς/πᾶσα/πᾶν*) means? You don't really have to know what the word is, but I do want you to know what it means. It means "all." That is, Jesus showed them how *all* of the Old Testament is about him, and especially how he must suffer and die for the sins of the world.

This must have been a fascinating conversation. I've often considered that if I ever get my hands on a Way Back Machine, you know, like a Tardis or a DeLorean, I would travel back in time to eavesdrop on this conversation. Of course, I'd have to brush up on my Aramaic, which would probably be about as hard as getting a Way Back Machine. I've often considered how fascinating that would be, but eventually I realized that this conversation would probably sound a lot like the book of Hebrews, which I can read any time I want. And I even wonder if this conversation might actually be the source material for Hebrews. So there's my plug for Wednesday night Bible study.

Before these disciples even recognized Jesus, he 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.

It's not like Jesus recited every single verse from the Old Testament and explained how it refers 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.

Perhaps he 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 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.

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS (Luke 24:13-35)

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.

The whole purpose of the Old Testament is to point forward to Jesus. And if the Old Testament is all about Jesus, then it's even easier to recognize that the New Testament is all about Jesus too. 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 around 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*. 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 here's the gracious truth we find in this passage. We've been underestimating our problem, but God did not. 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 graciously revealed 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.

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 is 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.

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