

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2020

“From a Standstill, to a Walk, to a Run!” (Luke 24:27)
By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior the risen Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Our text for this Third Sunday in Easter is from our Gospel reading, Luke 24:27

27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Here ends our text.

I. Our doubt filled lives leave us at a **standstill** in our own despair

The Easter Gospel readings for series A that we are following are setup like the release of a Star Wars Trilogy. Last week we heard how Jesus appeared to the disciples on Easter evening and then to doubting Thomas. On May 21st we'll pick up again in Luke 24 with our Lord's ascension and great commission. But today, we get the prequel. We get to hear the story of what happened on Easter afternoon leading up to Jesus appearance to the disciples in the closed room that we heard last week.

And, of course, it's better than any Star Wars movie! It's all real, and there are no special effects needed to disguise Jesus or make Him disappear. The humiliation of the cross is over. Only the battle scars remain on His now glorified and all-powerful risen body! The change takes each of His followers by surprise as they can hardly grasp the good news.

So, today's Gospel story of two travelers on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus is no different. It begins in sadness, but it ends with incredible joy. A transformation occurs along the 7 mile walk that takes between 2 and 3 hours – a transformation effected not by any special effects or stunning miracles, but by a back to basics hearing of the powerful Word of God. The trip starts in Jerusalem, but it always starts with Moses and the prophets - the same Moses and prophets that each of us have – all the Scriptures that expound Jesus Himself!

These two travelers trudged along with heavy hearts as the Gospel reading begins, recounting the events of the past few days – the crucifixion of Jesus.

We can identify with these two disciples because they are ordinary people. They aren't apostles just some ordinary disciples. One is called Cleopas and Scripture doesn't even give the name of the other...well, because **God** does everything and He receives all the glory! This story highlights this because the disciples could not discern who the 3rd traveler was until He was ready to reveal Himself. They could not make their hearts burn with joy on their own, but it was the powerful Word of God that changed them. Without the 3rd traveler, the two arrive in Emmaus in their same state or worse of depression.

We don't know if the one traveler is Clopas, the husband of the woman who went to the tomb early in the morning. The name is spelled differently in John 19:25. If it was the same Clopas or Cleopas, the other unnamed disciple could have been his wife. Usually, two men are pictured in artwork, but the Greek doesn't explicitly say that the other was a man. It just says two of them.

Their identities aren't important for us to know, but they **were** important to Jesus. He knew them and their sadness, and they didn't have to be one of the 12 for Jesus to come and walk with them. How comforting is that for us ordinary disciples to know! You don't have to be one of the 12 for Jesus to walk alongside with you. For He knows your heart, and He desires to fill it with His Word.

So, Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple received special attention from Jesus. And you do too, for Jesus is with you even now. He's asking you like He asked the two, why the long faces? What has you so sad in your life?

Yes, we can also identify with the two disciples in our moments of despair. As we travel through this life on our road to Emmaus, the sadness of this world cannot be avoided. The Emmaus disciples were dealing with the trauma of death of their loved One as we do also. Jesus came to redirect their sadness to the promises of Scripture. He does the same for us.

Jesus interrupts the conversation with a simple question.

“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

And the trudging comes to a complete stop. **“They stood still, their faces downcast.”** Luke supplies the details that other eyewitnesses provided for him of this account. (Luke 1:1-4)

The recounting of the crucifixion was so burdensome that they could not move another step.

18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

Ahh, what a choice of words to describe Jesus. Visitor. Yes, their eyes were restrained from knowing that it was Jesus who was talking to them who is the greatest of all Visitors.

For Jesus is indeed *the* Visitor from heaven above to earth below He has visited His people. This Visitor had wept over Jerusalem as visited it for the last time just one week earlier as Luke writes in chapter 19.

41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make for your peace!* But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.

His gracious visit was rejected by the very people He came to save. He desired for them to know “the things” that make for their peace – faith in the Messiah, but they did not know them.

And these two travelers did not know...they did not remember... that the things that they were now discussing, were the things that made for their peace because the Messiah did rise as He had promised.

19 “What things?” Jesus asked.

Jesus needs for them to see these things of sadness as God’s plan of salvation. Let’s talk about these things.

In gentleness, Jesus prods them unburden their hearts that have cast their faces down. He does the same for us... because He loves us. He has to prepare the ground before He can plant the seed. He has to hear your confession of doubt...and your confession of sins that make you question whether God could still possibly love you.

“What things?” Jesus simply asks the Emmaus disciples. “What things?” Jesus asks you. What has you stopped in your tracks, and caused your face to be downcast. Admit them freely to Jesus.

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:6-7

II. But Jesus’ invites us to **walk** with Him in His Word

So Jesus engages them in conversation...asks a question...and then most importantly, listens to their answer. He’s teaching us to do the same even as He listen to our cares. For once we are strengthened by His Word, we become the reflection of Jesus light to the world. We become the 3rd person in the conversation!

But, first Jesus listens. He listens to a sad story of hopes crushed. He listens to His followers recount the death the One who they believed would redeem Israel but was no longer living...of the One whose body was not seen by the women. They heard the women with their own ears say that the angels had told them that He was alive. And yet, they began their walk to Emmaus filled not with hope but with despair...because they saw no good in Good Friday and rejected any resurrection news as just a good Star Wars fable.

Ok, we’ve got some ground to cover, about 7 miles, and a two hour window of a recap of the Bible, since you missed it the first time.

25 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

Oh, foolish ones. He says in love to them. Oh, how Jesus takes the time to restore His lost people over and over again! Oh, how Jesus loves you and I and continually awakes us from our foolishness of weak faith.

It is pure foolishness to not see the crucifixion of Jesus, who knew no sin, as the only way that His people would become the righteousness of God. It is pure foolishness to look inwardly and try to restore one’s righteousness as the pharisees tried. So Luke quoted Jesus in chapter 11.

“Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. 40 Foolish ones! Luke 11:40

To make the inside of the cup clean, Jesus had to pay for the world’s sins!

In love, Paul learned from his Teacher and so said to the Galatians who had fallen into the same trap of works righteousness.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain? Galatians 3:1-4

NO! What Jesus did was all sufficient! Once and for all! This is the Good News. Jesus tells the travelers:

²⁶ Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and then to enter into His glory?"

And it all has been foretold since the beginning! Then, the real journey starts...the reawakening of the soul journey. For Jesus starts from the beginning, with Moses and the Prophets and expounds to them all the Scripture which speaks of Himself!

The Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible recorded by Moses, record the promises made to Abraham. We don't know exactly which scriptures Jesus spoke of in the two hour journey. But so pivotal is Genesis 26, I would not be surprised if Jesus had quoted this verse...

And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;

And most definitely Jesus would have explained to them that their crucified Lord was that Seed. And through His death, all nations would be blessed with the salvation He had gained.

And so Paul, also tells the good news to those "foolish Galatians" a few verses later.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

Back to our Gospel.

26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and then to enter into His glory?"

There is an important word here to note...the little word "then". For without this little word, the suffering of the Christ was in vain. The suffering had to happen to save the world. But to show the world that this was not the end of God's plan, there had to be a "then". There was a resurrection that the disciples were forgetting about. They were only remembering the crucifixion and burial. But, "then" there is so much more!

So, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

That was the cause of the downcast faces. They perceived themselves as the most pitiable. But, there is a "then". **Then He enters His glory.**

So, Paul exclaims in the very next verse, **"20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,"!**

Ahh, what is this burning that we're feeling in our hearts? The travelers would later recount. Do you feel the burn? Maybe you've heard. The supporters of the political candidate *Bernie Sanders* coined this phrase to say how excited they were about Bernie. Well, I don't think they're feeling the burn any more since he's now dropped out the presidential race.

But, there is One who never dropped out. He completed the race of races! It was necessary that the Christ to suffer ...to fulfill, to redeem, so that we would have the Good News that Moses and the prophets foretold. The Messiah has accomplished the salvation of the world! And those who believe have hearts that burn... burn with the Good News! ...for all people, not just one political party.

Hearts burn wherever God's Word is heard and meditated upon, while you walk...wherever you read your Bible...outside your house, inside your house...

III. Jesus disappears so that YOU now **run** with His Word to others!

So, the travelers made it back to their home in Emmaus. But, they wanted to hear more. Come inside our home. The glorified Jesus comes in because He cares for His people and wants to hear them invite Him to stay... to ask His blessing over the food that is eaten. And, then something happens. Their physical eyes are opened to see what their eyes of faith had now believed. The Lord is alive! It was You all along! And then, He disappears. Why?

Jesus disappeared from the two disciples because now it was **their** turn to walk, or better said, run by faith, not needing His visible presence. Jesus appeared but then disappeared to give the disciples the opportunity to move on their own. They were learning to fly on their own.

Jesus was present before they perceived Him. So also was His entrance in the locked room. He is present with us, even before we perceive Him. He opens our eyes through His Word that we may perceive His presence.

He was still present with them, of course, but His presence was now of a different nature. His **visible** contact with them now was not the rule, but the exception. This is the meaning of why Jesus says to Mary Magdalene 'Do not touch me' John 20: 17. She was not aware yet this changed relationship with His disciples and with us. It is a relationship that doesn't depend on the visible but invisible contact! Blessed are you who have not seen and yet believe!

He is present with you as you break bread in your homes just like the Emmaus travelers. We're not talking about the Lord's supper here, of course, there was only bread, one kind and no wine. This was an evening meal...just like the meal we're having in our homes each night until the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

So, the disciples ran back to Jerusalem after dinner to tell them the news that they had seen the risen Lord.

From a standstill, to a walk, to a run, the living Word made their hearts burn with excitement to tell another. What happened? The 3rd traveler multiplied His disciples by two through His saving Word.

And that's exactly what He wants each of you to do for others in despair. Walk with them. Listen to them. Ask them to tell you what their despair is, and then tell them the Good News, starting with Moses and the prophets! Jesus didn't need to reveal Himself in the 7 miles that He walked with them, because the Word about Him

caused their hearts to burn! And it's not about you or the unknown traveler. It's about the saving message that you and I and the unknown traveler share! It's always about Jesus!

This same Word you know! And you also know people in despair especially during this Pandemic and economic crisis. You don't have to leave your home. God's gift of technology allows you to walk by phone or text or video. God is calling YOU to be the 3rd companion who walks behind and listens to the conversations and then tell of the Good News. And God will graciously multiply His disciples through you!

26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and then to enter into His glory?"

Friends in Christ,

There is a "then" after Jesus suffering...after our suffering. For He has been raised to glory and declares that He is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

(1 Corinthians 15:20)

The ascension is Jesus' physical disappearance from our eyes so that we may trust in His Word and then be His witnesses to the world.

Again, we've heard the prequel, the sequel and in a few more weeks we'll revisit Luke 24 and see the concluding glory of Christ's ascension!

Yes, there is an entering into final glory! Christ's glory first and then ours! And yes, there's still one more eternal story to come for all of God's believing travelers in this world to the mansions beyond. Amen!

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Galatians 4:7)