

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

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

Jerusalem and the surrounding area were all abuzz. Jesus was the talk of the town. But now it seems it was all for nothing. It appears that Jesus was just like the others who claimed to be the promised messiah.

On this Third Sunday of Easter, we meet two disciples of Jesus who had great expectations. But on that first Easter afternoon, they believed their expectations all came to nothing. Now, we don't know much about these two disciples since they weren't among the Eleven. Now, they could have been among the 72, but this we don't know for sure either. All we know is the name of one of these men: Cleopas.

For these two disciples walking along the road, they were filled with bitter disappointments over dashed hopes. It could be that these two disciples were among the Palm Sunday crowds shouting "**Hosannah.**" The miracles and signs of Jesus had brought them to faith in Him, but the death of Jesus by crucifixion plunged them into deep despair. Even the report of the vision of angels by women about the empty tomb failed to lift their spirits. To them, the empty tomb was no guarantee of a bodily resurrection. Only the living body of the crucified Lord could give them fulfillment.

All of a sudden, a stranger joins them on the road. Unbeknownst to them, this stranger is Jesus, "**but their eyes were kept from recognizing him**" (Luke 24:16). Just like Jesus to come incognito, undercover as it were, an "undercover boss" for His own time. He hides Himself. Isaiah says, "**Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, the Savior**" (Isaiah 45:15). God often hides Himself. He does not always let Himself become visible. Yet, it is in His hiding of Himself that Jesus shows Himself to be our Savior.

It is not that these travelers on the road to Emmaus were confronted with a case of mistaken identity. Their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. It was not that the Lord Jesus was absent from them. No, He was right there with them on the road, but they were prevented from recognizing Him. They could not see Him for who He is.

Jesus remains to them as just a stranger. So, as the conversation goes on, they tell this stranger of their disappointment and now dead hope. To their surprise, this stranger appears to have heard nothing of this Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, and who they hoped would rise to life that very day. Some women gave them some hope, but that hope was dashed, since no one has seen Him.

Now, these men may not be among Christ's apostles, but they are certainly His disciples. Here, Jesus gets to hear what these men have to say if He were not present. And what these disciples say is practically exactly right, but they don't believe it. It's true that He was delivered up to death and crucified. Those are the exact words that Jesus would say to them. But they believe that His death was permanent, so they abandoned all hope. They are so close, and yet so far. They have the whole story right, but they just don't believe it. They don't believe the women and they don't believe the Scriptures. They know the Bible and they know the Prophets, but they don't believe it. They can't put two and two together.

As they are in despair, Jesus interrupts them saying: ***“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?”*** *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Luke 24:25-27).

After hearing God's plan of salvation spoken to them, they urge this stranger to stay with them, and He agrees to stay with them for a while. Ironically, this stranger takes the place of host as He does what any Jewish host would do at mealtime. He takes, blesses, breaks, and distributes the bread to His companions. And at once, their eyes were opened. They recognized Jesus! This is the same Man who was crucified, the very Man on whom their hopes were pinned. He is alive! And He is with them! Jesus was no phantom. He was no ghost. It was Jesus! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Yet, when their eyes were finally opened to see who it is who is with them, Jesus disappears.

With the Lord's exalted Body, He can do with it as He wills. His Body is no longer confined by geography or time, it is the Lord's Body. And with His Body, as we heard last week, locked doors are no longer a barrier. With His Body, He need not stay put in one place at a time. But where He puts Himself, He puts Himself for you. God does not invite you to search for Him where He cannot be found, such as in the cosmic reaches of space or in the depths of your own soul.

We, too, are often like these disciples. We face uncertainties. We face fears and anxieties. We face tragedies. In our moments of despair, we may even be tempted to ask, “Where are you God?” and “Why do You allow bad things to happen?”

But the Triune God does not leave you to fend for yourself. He may be hidden, but that doesn't mean that He is not there. Being raised from the dead, Jesus is free to be wherever He puts Himself for you. And you need not doubt as to where that is.

The Lord hid Himself from those men on the road to Emmaus, so that He might reveal Himself to them, to show Himself where and when it pleases Him. And this is how Jesus wills to be known by you: in His Scriptures! So, in your life's toughest moments, those moments of uncertainty and doubt, open the Scriptures!

It is the Scriptures that testify of Him as the very Son of God, who had to be handed over to evil men, crucified, and resurrected for us.

The redemption that these Emmaus disciples had hoped for had indeed taken place, but it was far greater than what they could ever imagine. Redemption took place not in some act of political liberation. It happened in the death of God's only begotten Son, who paid the price of our release not with silver or gold, but with His own precious blood. That is what was necessary! ***“It was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory”*** (Luke 24:26).

It was necessary for you and your salvation. It has been done. The work is completed for you. It is finished. Jesus was put to death for your trespasses and raised again for your justification!

Yet even after His bodily resurrection, the Lord Jesus hides His glory. He does not overwhelm the road-weary sojourners on the road to Emmaus with a blinding flash of His dazzling radiance. Instead, He comes to them as a stranger whose identity is concealed from their eyes. This stranger reveals Himself in His words that interpret the Scriptures concerning Himself and in the breaking of the bread.

What the Lord did for the Emmaus disciples, He does for you. Your eyes are kept from seeing Him. Now, there will come a day when you will see Him in all of His glory. But until that day of Christ's full appearing – that great and magnificent day – Jesus is concealed from our view.

But on that Last Day when He descends from above, all eyes will be upon Him, either to their everlasting joy or their eternal shame. Then we will behold Him and not another.

At that moment, we will see our Redeemer as Job confessed: ***“After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, who I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another”*** (Job 19:26-27). But this is still to come.

Now to recognize Jesus today means that He vanishes from our sight. He hides Himself so that we may learn to hear Him, and trust in Him, for faith comes not by sight but by the hearing of the Scriptures as St. Paul proclaims: ***“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ”*** (Romans 10:17).

Now, we may not see Him, but we still hear Him. We hear Him in His Word of absolution that declares, ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** Like the Emmaus disciples, we hear His voice at the Holy Supper, where He gives you His Body to eat and His Blood to drink for the forgiveness of your sins.

Through all the uncertainties of this fallen, sinful world, Christ is always found where He promises to be – His Word and Sacrament – as He assures us of the comfort of forgiveness and reconciliation. So, as the sinful world changes as the wind blows, Christ promises to be where He always is: His Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament, that gives us forgiveness of sins, which begets eternal life and salvation.

For us, too, Jesus is unseen, hidden under the words of Scripture and under the bread and wine. But when He speaks, our hearts are enflamed with faith.

Like the Emmaus disciples, our eyes are opened, and we recognize Him, but He never vanishes from our hearing, for ***“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ”*** (Romans 10:17). Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +