

Third Sunday of Easter – 2023

Acts 2:14, 36-41

1 Peter 1:17-25

Luke 24:13-35

During our evening services in Advent and Lent, we regularly sing a hymn that is beautifully poetic, a hymn that invariably touches the soul. Text and tune are marvelously married and the words of the hymn capture a biblical episode as well as a deeply human cry of the heart. It is an evening hymn. Evening hymns remind the faithful of the fleeting brevity of human life. The end of the day and the end of life have a great deal in common. At the end of life, none of us want to be alone. Who will be there at the end of your life? The hymn is titled “Abide with Me.” “Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.” “Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day; Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away; Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” “Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies. Heav’n’s morning breaks, earth’s vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me” (Abide with Me ~ LSB 878, st. 1, 4, 6).

These two disciples are heartbroken. Cleopas and his unnamed companion are spiritually in the darkness. What they believe is that life had been quenched, snuffed out. The Lord Christ had been crucified and hope itself had been nailed to that cross. He who had so vibrantly animated their hearts was dead. Have you ever been in the dark, spiritually? Have you ever been heartbroken, in a place where Christ’s promises hang limp in your mind, in a place where your heart is full of mud? Jesus knew. Jesus came to address the darkness in us. One of His promises is this: “Whoever who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). It’s Easter. The risen King is bringing the light of life to the world. It is going to unfold *carefully* with these two. Jesus comes and walks with them. “Their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). The unnamed agent, the One behind those two not recognizing Jesus, is Jesus Himself. At the right time, He would open their eyes.

The Lord prods them with a few leading questions and out streams their misgivings, their doubts, their muddled faith. Why are they so badly confused? Jesus’ death, that horrific cross, it was antithetical to what they believed about the promised Messiah. It was a scandal. It was humiliating. There was no place in their religion, no place in their heart for a crucified Messiah. They give voice to their anemic faith: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). Past tense; had hoped; their hope had been pummeled; Jesus of Nazareth was defeated; they completely failed to understand God’s plan. The cross... that *couldn’t be* God’s plan. Even after the women had told them that Jesus was alive, Cleopas and his companion walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus in darkness. A transformation was about to take place. That’s *why* Christ walked with them, to transform their darkness, to open their eyes, to make their hearts burn with joy, burn with knowledge, burn with confidence and hope and glory and truth and Divine love, Divine power, burn with the wonder of Divine sacrifice, Divine Triumph.

Jesus rebuked them. Don’t forget it. You are not above suffering a rebuke. God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:5-6). God will rattle your cage from time to time. You need it.

You give the unbelieving world entirely too much credit and God not nearly enough. You engage in self-pity. Pessimism is a rank aroma on Christian. Puddleglum and Eeyore are charming children's fictional characters but a congregation full of depressing adults isn't too inspiring. Snap *out* of it! Wakey, wakey! Jesus rebuked them: "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25). They needed that rebuke.

But it doesn't stop with a rebuke. **A lifetime was had on that road.** Transformation – which came from God's Word, which came from Christ's voice, which came from hearing of grace and blood and love and death – those two men were transformed. Christ was their teacher. He showed them inescapable truths. Death and resurrection is an inescapable truth. Do you believe that the Scripture contains facts? Do you believe that the Scripture contains inescapable truth? Do you believe that Christ is accompanying us as we walk in the way, as we journey toward our heavenly destiny, that He abides with us and opens the Scripture and shows us the inescapable truth of His very life? Has Christianity transformed you? Have you been brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light? Does hope animate your heart because you know that Christ is risen from the dead and His resurrection is something that He places in you? He opened the Scriptures to them and their hearts burned with the splendor of it. That is you.

Abide with us. That's what they asked. Stay with us, remain with us, abide with us; of course that's what they asked. God walked with them on the road. God restored their hope by pointing them to inescapable truth. God made their hearts burn with the glory of His Word. Of course they asked Jesus to abide with them. Implicitly, what are they asking for? They are asking for more. Jesus had more. More of His grace would be at the table. Eyes would be opened at the table. An inescapable truth would be revealed at the table. It's a prayer: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent" (Luke 24:29). The Lord inspired that prayer and He had always intended to answer it. He is Immanuel – God with us. Your faith regularly prays that prayer: Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. "So he went in to stay with them" (Luke 24:29). As host, Jesus went into their home, which was transformed into a church, and *He* served *them*. In exactly the same way, Jesus answers your prayer.

"When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). Are those words deeply embedded in your soul? They are in mine. Take, eat, this is My body, given for you. That is an inescapable truth. Take, drink, this is my blood, shed for you. *That* is God with us; *that* is God abiding with us. Their eyes were opened. In that beautiful instant, their eyes were opened. They saw, they apprehended in all its magnificence that the crucified and risen Messiah was the host at the table. Adam and Eve had their eyes opened. That's what the book of Genesis says (Genesis 3:7). The first meal in Holy Scripture is an unholy meal. Sin; Adam and Eve saw it in themselves. The image of God had been trashed. They vainly tried to remedy the situation with fig leaves. Naked; shame; sin and death – their eyes were opened to it all. Now Cleopas and his companion have *their* eyes opened. There He is; the crucified and risen Messiah is the image of God and we are restored. Where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Romans 5:20). A new meal; an eternal banquet; a feast with the resurrected King; our eyes are opened. Forgiveness, hope, life – the risen Savior feeds us with Himself.

And Christ disappears. Jesus vanished from their sight. He intentionally opens their eyes as He extends bread to them and at that moment He removes His visible presence from their sight. Why? He is telling you where He is to be found. This Divine Service is a recapitulation of the journey to Emmaus on Easter. Christ reminds us that He has paid for our sins. The Word of the Gospel is broken open here and we apprehend the present Savior who gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink. The Service of the Word leads to the Service of the Sacrament. In this Divine Service we participate in His death and resurrection and we are transformed. No matter what we face in this life, He abides with us and instills in us a hope that cannot be defeated. Our eyes are opened to see that this new meal reverses the first meal in Eden. Life, not death, defines everyone in this room. He is with us. He will always be with us. In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.