

April 6, 2006

Third Sunday of Easter

“The Word points to Jesus...Jesus points to the Word”

Luke 24:13-35

*That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 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. 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?” 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, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 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. 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.” And he said to them, “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.*

*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 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. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. 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?” And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Sermon

He is risen! (*He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!*) Praise be to God. It's very easy for us to let that saying become some sort of catch phrase. Very often such idioms carve their way into our cerebral cortex and become an automatic response. We do a couple of them in church almost every week. You know, like, “The Lord be with you.” (*And also with you.*) “Go in Peace.” (*Serve the Lord.*) We do this a lot out in our daily lives. Someone sneezes and we say “God bless you.” Someone says “Thank you.” We say “You're welcome.” Someone says, “Do you want to come to my crawfish boil,” and we say “Yes, I'd love to come to your crawfish boil.” It's just kind of automatic.

And in the case of “He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!” I'm not even going to say that it's a bad thing for this to be automatic. The passion of Christ and His resurrection should be so deeply ingrained on our psyche and our souls that it should be automatic for us. A place we automatically flee in distress for comfort. A place we automatically go to give thanks in every

blessing. And of course a place we return to again and again in our sin to receive the forgiveness Christ paid so dearly on the cross to give us.

Last week I spoke of the gift of faith that allows us to say this wonderful catch phrase with conviction. Being able to believe is not something we do, but something God does for us. It's just as we say from Luther's Small Catechism, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him: but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

Today I want to talk a bit about how that faith gets delivered. And we have a great example of a lack of and a need for faith in today's Gospel lesson. There are a couple guys from the wider circle of Jesus disciples walking along the road to Emmaus on Easter day. And Jesus appears to them, but they are kept from recognizing Him so they think He is just some guy. They are talking about all the things that just happened; the trial and crucifixion of Jesus on Friday and the empty tomb that very morning. So Jesus, this guy, asks them what's up with all that. And what don't they say? They don't say, "He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!"

No. Luke tells us that they are sad faced. They are totally bummed out. They don't believe. And the really amazing part is that they recount the entire Easter story in their unbelief. They tell about the crucifixion and death and tomb. Then they tell of the empty tomb and the appearance of angels. But they are still sad faced. They have taken the facts and run them through their understanding of life and the world and come up with the wrong conclusion. They've decided the whole Jesus as messiah idea was wrong. "*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel,*" they say, as if redemption hadn't happened. As if Christ's death on the cross hadn't accomplished anything.

The women had told of the angel's announcement, but these guys must have figured that the ladies had lost their marbles. To their minds, the angelic announcement had to be fantasy because, well, someone doing something as amazing and powerful as coming back from the dead after not doing anything to save Himself from being crucified in the first place; that's just coo coo. They must have figured that Jesus' body had been stolen or something. They could get their minds around that. Resurrection just didn't fit their mindset. They don't believe. They took what they'd seen and heard in Jesus' ministry, in His death and in His empty tomb and run it through their life experience, their logic and their cultural expectation of messiah and decided Jesus wasn't where redemption was at.

And Jesus kind of let's them have it. "*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*" Jesus' rebuke isn't aimed at their minds. He doesn't say that their logical method and ability to reason is defective—at least not in and of itself. What He is criticizing is the source from which they are drawing truth. The truth of God's Word is there for them, but they haven't gone there. Instead they've stuck with what they can discern as truth according to themselves and the wisdom and expectations of the culture in which they live. Jesus points them to Holy Scripture, to the wisdom of God and how He works in ways far above and beyond mankind. "*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.*"

Jesus doesn't just reveal Himself, but He goes to Holy Scripture for the truth! And the disciples speak later of how their hearts burned within them as Christ revealed the Word to them. The Word of truth was working faith in them even before Jesus revealed His true identity! The revelation of God through Holy Scripture trumped their cultural presuppositions and worldly wisdom. God's Word gained authority in their hearts and their logic received the truth of Christ.

If Christ had chosen not to reveal Himself to them in Emmaus, I kind of think these two disciples would have returned to Jerusalem at some point and believed and rejoiced with the rest of them saying, “He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!”

We have had the Holy Scriptures opened to us even more so. Christ instituted the church and through His Holy Spirit it continues to flourish. Through the Holy Spirit the apostles of Christ proclaimed and wrote down God’s work of salvation through Christ, giving us the New Testament. Through these words and the same Holy Spirit you and I have been brought to saving faith.

Yet even as these words were being written, some people were trying to bend the message to suit their worldly wisdom or to make it condone their selfish and sinful desires. Some folks wanted to twist the message of salvation as a free pass to sin without any consequences. Others tried to make Christ’s work only part effective and make believers put themselves back under the law of good works earning God’s favor. And people are still trying to do it today. We can look at our television or into some other denominations or religions and pick them out. But the one we have to be most worried about is the one staring back at us in the mirror every morning.

We say “He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!” and believe it as revealed in Scripture, but then somehow turn around and ignore a lot of what the same Word of God says about how we live as children of God. We do this inwardly as we try to make excuses for and rationalize our sin, rather than seeking to act out repentance in our lives. We do it outwardly as we fail to spread our faith to others as Jesus commanded us.

Why do we do it? Much of it is the same problem as the two disciples on the road. We give authority to cultural expectations, presuppositions and the logic of worldly experience. We strive to conform to the norms of human things rather than divine things. We dwell in the words and ideas motivated by the desires of people rather than the Word of God and His desire for us to come to know Him. How often do we seek to get out from under the Word of God rather than revel in all that it reveals God has done for us?

You know where authority lies. Don’t be foolish! Don’t be slow of heart to believe all that God’s Word has revealed to you! It is this Word that has revealed the truth that He is risen! It is this Word that reveals your sins are forgiven! It is the Word of joy and salvation for all who believe. Don’t seek to hide from it because it clashes with your culture and sinful desires. Cling every more closely to it in the face of these things. Read your Bible and trust the truths it tells. Let it make demands on your life. Let it make your heart burn within you as you realize what God has done for you and how close you are to Him because of it.

“He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!” is automatic for us. Let all that goes along with it be automatic also. Everything in Holy Scripture points to the risen Christ, how He gave everything to forgive our sins and restore our broken relationship with God, and how we now live in the reality of His death and resurrection. Let your automatic response be to look to God’s Word as the authority in your life. In your sin don’t deny it, but run to its message of comfort and reconciliation. Let it be your counselor and guide in all situations. Glory in its message of the loving God who sacrificed Himself so you might again be His holy child.

Through the Holy Spirit speaking through God’s Word, we are like these two disciples. Our eyes have been opened and we recognize Jesus. We know the blessing He is to us. Receive Him as fully as you possibly can. Receive Him in His Sacrament and receive Him in His Word. In all things let looking to Him be as automatic as “He is Risen!”...

