

SERMON TEXT FOR EASTER 3A

PREACHED APRIL 30, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Luke 24.13-35; Acts 2.14a, 36-41; Psalm 116.1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1.17-23

This **isn't** how the story was supposed to end. Remember the waving **palms**? What about the **victory**, and the **celebrating**, and God's **kingdom coming** to earth? **All of it is gone.**

Now the disciples find themselves walking down a road to Emmaus. It's likely not even an **actual**, physical place - more like a **state of being**. One theologian describes it as the place where "we throw up our hands and say 'Let the whole darned thing go to hang. It makes no difference anyway.'" It's the place of **desolation**. **We've all been there**, haven't we?

It's the place where a young mother is cradling her **stillborn child** in her arms, walking around the delivery room with no idea where to go or what to do.

It's the awkward silence and disbelief after the doctor announces, "Stage 4 **Cancer.**"

It's the rage a **military family** feels when the doorbell rings and serious-looking soldiers are waiting on the other side of the door. "We are sorry to inform you..."

Yes, the disciples are in a place of **desolation**. But then, the **miraculous** happens: **Jesus comes near!** But unfortunately "*their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*" **Why don't they see him**, the one they put their **faith** in and **left everything** for? Does **grief** have them in the grips of **despair**, unable to function? Are **tears** clouding their vision? Are they simply unable to pick up their **heads** from watching the dust cling to their feet

Luke leaves these **details** to our imaginations. We only know that Jesus - in a most **pastoral, caring** way - meets them on the road and invites them to tell their story. "*So, tell me what things have been like for you over these past few days.*" And they **share**. They share what it was like to look across **Golgotha** and see the Roman guards celebrating their **victory** at Jesus' death. They share what it was like to walk through Jerusalem and be **laughed** at by those who never thought Jesus was the Messiah. They share what it was like to **flee** the city, fearful that **they** might be crucified next, starting toward a **destination unknown** because they simply can't stay where they **are**. They share what it is like to feel **defeated, deflated and alone**.

They do this on **Easter Sunday** according to Luke's gospel. Luke says this is still the **same day** the women went to the **tomb** and then told the **others** what they had heard and saw: not just a **missing body** but the **angels** saying that **Jesus is alive**. Still, Cleopas and his companion can't see past the **empty tomb** - which is **anything** but a sign of **victory** to them.

So Jesus tries to **explain** it all to them. *“Don’t you understand that this is all part of the **plan**? We **talked** about this. Don’t you **remember**?”* Clearly they do not. And not surprisingly, **they never do**. Jesus’ disciples in the gospel accounts just don’t **ever** seem to get it — no matter **how many times** he tries to tell them.

By now it’s gotten **late** in the day. So they offer their visitor a place to lay his head for the night — not because he’s **Jesus**, but because it’s the **hospitable** thing to do. They sit down to a **meal** together, and their guest **takes** bread, **blesses** it, **breaks** it, and **gives** it to them.

How many times have they **seen** Christ do this before? **Countless** times, I’m sure, in three years. So maybe it shouldn’t be surprising that it is finally **this act** of breaking bread together in which their eyes are opened and they **recognize** the risen Christ in their midst. It isn’t when he **walks** with them; it isn’t when he tries to **explain** both the scriptures and his pronouncements to them, again. No, it is when he **takes, blesses, breaks, and gives them bread**—something **so ordinary** that they have seen it before, time and time again.

It’s only **then** that the **tears** give way, their **heads** look up from the table, and they finally see who has been **journeying** with them. **Jesus is alive after all!** The tomb, the angels, the women—can it really be true? It is all coming back to them now. They **see** and **comprehend** his words. And then, in an **instant, he is gone**.

Is this not the way God so often enters our lives? Not in the **miraculous**, but in **ordinary** taking, blessing, breaking, and giving.

- In the **hug** of a friend we haven’t seen in a while,
- in the **laughter** of a child frolicking in the grass
- in breaking a **trail** through the woods
- in **giving** to the food pantry
- in **blessing** an evening meal
- in a cool, refreshing drink of **water**
- in the words of a familiar scripture passage that somehow sounds new and different. In **these** moments, we recognize God.

With our **eyes opened** in the midst of this everyday reality we, **like** the disciples, are reminded that **all is not lost**. We are not **defeated** or **alone**. **Love has won! Death** has been **swallowed up** in **victory**. Jesus is no longer **bound** by the tomb, but **seeks us** in the **ordinary** and in the **miraculous** of our lives. **Easter is here to stay**. We **see** the risen Christ, and we begin to understand that **all of the promises that Christ made to his disciples** – and to **all** of his children – **have been fulfilled**. Thanks be to God.