

4-26-20 3rd Sunday of Easter

Pastor Priewe

Series: Victory Over Despair

Theme: The Story that Sets Your Heart on Fire.

Luke 24:13–35

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” ³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Is the load starting to feel like too much? Has the thought of another month or more of distance or crampedness set in on you like a gloomy fog? Maybe you’ve tried one of those heart-warming, inspirational stories during your time stuck at home. There’s something about a nice feel good story that people just love.

How does a movie get to be called heart-warming anyway? It’s all about the setting and lead-up. The main character is facing terrible circumstances. Her Pa is sick, the dog died, the farm is about to get fore-closed on, and then her no-good boyfriend skipped town. Chaos erupts, everything’s in shambles. She’s about to go over the brink of despair! But you know how the familiar tale ends, don’t you! After a flood of tears, she picks herself up, plants the fields, her father recovers, they keep the farm, and she falls

madly in love with the new ranch hand, gets married and lives happily ever after! Truly-heartwarming, inspirational, the critics say!

But the warmth fades faster than the fleeing credits, and gloom once again resumes. It's then we understand Isaiah's words, **"Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:2)**. Today our Lord brings you the epic **story that will set your sullen heart on fire**. It's one chapter in the true story of a lasting **victory over despair**. This is the story that will warm your hearts and satisfy your mind for the rest of your life.

Setting: You can picture it now, two companions sluggishly walking down the road. Their world has been turned upside down. As they walk, they keep trudging over the same thoughts, trying to make sense of their lives. But it's no use, they can't untie the knots in their stomach. You could cut the weariness with a knife. As they meander along in their sullen trance, they hardly even notice another traveler come up beside them and begin to listen. Soon he asks **"What are you discussing together as you walk along?" (Luke 24:17)**.

Rising Action: So we begin to see **conflict rising in their hearts** as the question stops them in their tracks, their faces covered with gloom. Seriously, what rock did this guy crawl out from under? **"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (24:18)**. They'll find out later the true irony of what they do and don't know about what has happened in these last days, and what this stranger really knows.

"What things?" the "Traveler" said. Now is the time for their account of the circumstances. Now is the test for the hidden Teacher to see what his students have learned from him. **"He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." (24:19)**. It's pretty good so far. Maybe it's not Peter's rock solid confession, **"He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"** But it was accurate enough. They had seen him working wonders. They had seen him displaying power in word and deed, baffling the teachers of the law and restoring the sick and the sinful. It was enough to send their hopes soaring high until everything came crashing down with what happened next. **"The chief priest and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him." (24:20)**.

What they say next is the real kicker, **"But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (24:21)**. **"WE HAD HOPED."** When he died, so died their hope. We talked last week about what hope is—an inside reason to rejoice, the certainty based on what God promises is going to happen in the future. Their hope had been crucified with Jesus. They knew no inside reason to be joyful, they had no certainty about what God had promised in the future. When true biblical hope dies, all that is left is despair. They were living as if Jesus was dead for good, and so was their hope.

We have the benefit of looking back and hindsight is always 20/20. We can look back at the nine times it is recorded in the gospels, where Jesus explicitly tells them what would happen. **"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31-33)**. We might be awfully tempted to say, "You dense despairing disciples! How did you not understand? How could you forget? You saw him rejected and handed over. You saw him killed? How could you forget the last 'and'? **'And after three days rise again.'** Why weren't you standing outside the tomb on the third day waiting for him to come out? The women even came to you on the third day and told everyone what the angels said, that he was alive, and still it was like nonsense to you."

Hindsight is 20/20, but our eyes don't see so clearly in the present. The present veil of tears is thick like a blinding fog. You know exactly what it is like to grope along like those disciples in a hopeless despair. To wake up in the morning, churning with the same stress you toss and turned with through the night. To live day after day captive to the same sins as if the devil still reigned and Jesus hadn't conquered anything at all. We know what it's like when our sullen soul starts to believe that a virus rules this world instead of the Risen Lord. We look through the present veil of tears and are fooled into living as if Jesus is still dead.

‘Pastor, you said this was going to be heart-warming!’ This is just depressing. Now the scene has been set, the conflict is full-grown and finally we’ve come to the **moment of crisis**. The “Ignorant Traveler” suddenly turns the tables and becomes the “Traveling Teacher. **“How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**”

If only we had the archived video recording of the Bible class the hidden Jesus had with them on that day, as he explained what the Scriptures said about his suffering, death, and resurrection. But already he is starting to work in the way he works today. The Word of God made flesh was standing in front of them and yet he was pointing them to the same thing he points us today—the written Word.

There is written the everlasting story that set their hearts on fire. There is recorded the Father’s unfailing love, a promise made and a promise kept. There we learn that the plan of salvation was written so surely that the Lamb was already slain from the foundation of the world. Then the Lamb came willingly in time, just as the Scriptures foretold, to offer the sacrifice demanded to redeem the wayward children.

Even before Christ came to this earth in the flesh, the Word of God did not foretell only a dead Lamb. It foretold a victorious king, one whose body would not see decay, one who would conquer death and destroy despair, one who would reign in glory on his Father’s throne forever. The mysterious traveler opened for them the story of the Scriptures on their walk to Emmaus and it **set their sullen hearts on fire**.

Like children crying out for just one more story, so they begged him, **“Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.”** (24:29). They realized this man had words of life, and they couldn’t get enough. He had lifted the veil of tears and reaffirmed for them the certain hope of Christ’s resurrection declared in the Scriptures. Christ had to suffer **and** then enter his glory! All this Jesus the traveling teacher had done through the Word, **before** showing them who he was!

Then came the moment of **final resolution**. He sat down to eat with them in the familiar way he had always done, and as he gave thanks and gave them bread, the veil was finally lifted! **“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him (the Risen Lord!), and he disappeared from their sight.”** (24:31). That moment their eyes were opened wasn’t nearly as important as the moments that Traveling Physician spent opening the eyes of their despairing hearts with his Word. He had revived their sinking hopes with the certainty of the resurrection and they knew it. **“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”** (24:32).

Those moments are just as important for us. Despair flees when the Scriptures set our hearts on fire with hope. Despair suffocates when the power of the law and the sting of death is swallowed in victory. Despair dies because Jesus lives and we know it!

How do we live when we know he’s alive? Emmaus was about seven miles away from Jerusalem. Those disciples had spent about the last two hours walking there before they sat down to eat. It was already about dark by the time they got there, and needless to say it had been an emotional day. But the moment after they recognized the Risen Lord, it was “go-time!” **“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.”** (24:33). A nice 7-mile jaunt in the dark back to Jerusalem where Jews were looking to wipe out the rest of the disciples might have been a little radical, don’t you think? Nope, didn’t matter!

Jesus was alive and so was their hope, and their hearts were burning to tell somebody about it! Since that day, this story has been burning in the hearts of Christians everywhere. But there’s one major difference. That mysterious traveling preacher--he’s not walking the roads anymore! He gave his story to you. Go be the mouth of God and give somebody hope, victory over despair. Tell them the story that set your heart on fire—Jesus Christ, raised from the dead! Risen Indeed! Amen.