

Luke 24:13-35

We are now two weeks away from Easter. How has your journey been to this point? Have you been joyfully skipping through life, or have you been walking sad and slow like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? The way Luke tells it, for these two men, life was about as bad as it could get. Looking at them, you would never know that Jesus had risen from the dead. They were dejected. Life had handed them a bowl of cherries which turned out to be the pits. They're like men who invested their life-savings in one particular stock, and the company went bankrupt and they lost everything. These men had pinned all their hopes on Jesus. He was it. He was the One to redeem Israel. But three days ago He was condemned and crucified, and there's all this talk from some women that an angel said He was alive, but no one has seen His body. I don't know how life is going for you right now, but if it's not so good, could it be any worse than how it was for these two? For them, there was little reason to keep on living. They certainly had no reason to stay in Jerusalem. So they walked home to Emmaus, but even going home, for them now, was not a positive thing.

In the two weeks since you were here for the Easter celebration, what has happened in your life? I'd be shocked if any of us replied, "It's all been good. No troubles. No problems whatsoever. It's all been positive 24/7." There are days for us when our footsteps fall in line with those of these two disciples. There are days when the words, "Christ is risen! Alleluia!" are the farthest thing from our minds. There are days when, for us as with those two, the story ends at the cross and not at the empty tomb.

When Jesus joined these two men in their journey, their hearts did not skip a beat, with their mouths exclaiming, "Jesus! You are alive!" They did not recognize Him. He was just a stranger. Even when He spoke to them asking why they were so troubled, they just stood still looking sad. They needed something. They needed help--a pick-me-up of some kind. They didn't need a barstool with beer after beer in which to drown their sorrows. They needed to be lifted out of their sadness, out of their depression. So what does Jesus do? He doesn't yell, "Surprise! It's Me!" He rebukes them. He calls them fools and sluggards. But then He opens the Scriptures to them, and in all the Scriptures, from Moses through all the Prophets, *"He interprets to them the things concerning Himself."*

We go through our days and sometimes we say, "I need a cup of coffee," or "I need an Advil," or "I need a bowl of ice cream." Do we ever say, "I need the Holy Scriptures," "I need to spend five minutes in God's Word," "I need the Risen Lord in my life"? These two disciples thought that they simply needed to walk home. But Jesus knew what they really needed. That's why He came to them, walked with them, and opened the Scriptures to them. We need exactly what these two needed because, all in all, we are like them. We get depressed when life doesn't go well. We fly off the handle when others say things that irritate us. We feel burdened. We deal with fears. We hate it that we give in to sin so often.

Even when we are in Jesus' presence, life does not immediately become better. When Jesus first began walking with these two disciples from Emmaus, they were just as sad and troubled as before He appeared. Did your troubles suddenly vanish when you walked into church this morning? Did your anger against your neighbor disappear when you sat down in the pew? Did your guilt fade off into the distance when you breathed in the air of God's House? Hardly. But if, after being filled with God's Word, you still leave today with guilt, or depression, or anger, then you need to come and see your pastor.

When these two disciples reached Emmaus, Jesus' words had already changed them because they wanted, more than anything else, for Jesus to come in and stay with them. They did not realize they were in the presence of the Risen Lord, but already their sadness was vanishing. Any anger, and fear, and frustration were leaving. God's Word does that. It changes us. It renews us. It lifts us out of our troubles. It deals with our anger and our guilt. It brings us out of the pits, out of death into life.

How foolish and slow of heart we are, just like these two were. We separate God's Word from the rest of our life. We compartmentalize. We keep what goes on in here, and what goes on out there, distinct from each other. And so we just don't get it. We walk sad and slow through life just as the Emmaus disciples did. We let our troubles get to us. We let others get to us. We go to bed often with a guilty conscience. We can't figure out why we just cannot get the upper hand over sin and temptation.

It's because the Scriptures remain, for us, a closed book. If we'd dig in and read them, if we'd put the Treasury of Daily Prayer out and read it daily, if we'd get involved with Bible Study, if we'd be attentive and listen in church and apply the words of God to our life we would find that life would be different. The two Emmaus disciples ran back to Jerusalem after they knew it was the Lord. No more walking sad. No more frustration, and depression, and guilt. Yes, their bodies were tired--it was late in the day and they had just traveled seven miles--but now life was different. Jesus was alive! And His words were now a part of them. His words were in their hearts and minds and every part of their being.

Whether you know it or not, every time you come here, every time you open the Scriptures, Jesus does for you what He did for these two. He opens the Scriptures to you. For so many the Scriptures are a closed book. They don't read them, perhaps, or come to church much. But most of all, the Scriptures are closed because the Risen Lord, for them, is not in them. If the Bible isn't about Jesus then it's worthless. If God's words are just rules to follow and interesting stories, who needs them! But it is all about Christ, from cover to cover. Jesus says so. Every bit of it is about Him. Jesus is the Word of God. And so when you sit and read, or sit and listen, the same Lord who conquered sin, death, and hell is coming into you, and He can handle any trouble, any sin, any depression and guilt that dwells within you.

The Scriptures are open for you when you believe, by God's working in you, that Christ died for you, that He is risen, and has baptized you into His death and resurrection, and comes to you in bread and wine. You and I cannot deal with our own guilt, but Jesus can. You and I cannot rid ourselves of our anger, but Jesus can. You and I cannot overcome sin, temptation, and depression, but Jesus can. He did it for the two disciples from Emmaus, and He can, and does, do all this for you. He does it by opening the Word of God to you and through that Word comes into you.

One of those Emmaus disciples, it seems, had the name Simon. Simon...Simon Peter? Possibly so. Some theologians think so. No wonder, then, that Jesus came to these men. Simon was still living in his guilt. He had denied his Lord three times, and the next thing he knew, Jesus was dead. What guilt! What remorse! What a burden for him. No wonder he was walking sad and slow along the road. But when these two knew it was Jesus, they rushed back to Jerusalem. Simon always was one who could not sit still. And when they found the others, it was reported to them, "*The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!*" To Simon Jesus appeared. This was big news for them all. Jesus appeared to Simon showing that He was not angry at him. Jesus had forgiven Simon. He came to him and opened the Word of God to him.

Friend, whatever your name, Jesus comes now to you in Word and Sacrament. He comes to you no matter how you have lived. No matter how sad and depressed, how angry or how guilty you have been. At this very moment Jesus is opening God's Word to you and He is declaring to you that you are forgiven. Jesus has no anger against you. As He forgave Simon, so He forgives you. And on the altar, Jesus who opened His side for you on the cross, now gives you that precious blood so that you are assured that all your sin is truly washed away. You do not need to walk through life sad and slow any more. Your Jesus lives! He lives to forgive you. And He lives, through Word and Sacrament, to abide always with you. Amen.