Sermon Luke 24: 13-35

3rd Sunday of Easter

American Lutheran Church

Pastor Carla Johnsen

April 26, 2020

Grace and peace to you this day from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Often, when I read the Bible, I am struck with how little things have changed in the past 2000 years. Ok, so there have been a lot of changes. 2000 years ago, the Gospel was spread through travel, word of mouth and letters. Today, we use all of the methods they did back then, and we Facebook, Email, Twitter, YouTube, Zoom and a wide variety of other apps as well. Yet 2000 years ago when the disciples were confused, discouraged, and depressed, they went for a walk…and 2000 years later, so do we. This week I left church rather late on a couple of nights. I have a bad habit of losing track of time when I am working on a project I’m enjoying. Before I know it, Todd is home and texting me to see if I am alright and still at work. Anyway, I came home one evening at about 11 PM and the walkers were still out in my neighborhood walking their dogs. At all times of the day, people are out walking, it seems. Why?

I walk because I am tired of being cooped up and I need some exercise. I walk because it is nice to look at different scenery. I walk because, walking helps me mull over the ideas that roll around in my head. I walk because if I walk long enough I am tired and so even if I am upset about something, I am almost guaranteed to sleep better, and it seems like problems seem to shrink just a little when I’ve had a good night’s rest. These days, I walk because I know that when I do, I will see other people faces and I will know that life still continues out there in the world and time still moves even though there are many times when it feels like time is just standing still. I walk because it is way to work through the storms that rage in my life.

2000 years ago when the disciple Cleopus and his friend left Jerusalem behind, they were most likely walking home. They had been to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and worship God in the temple, but their trip had not gone as expected. Jesus had been violently arrested, unjustly condemned, hung on a cross to die the shameful death of a criminal, and buried in a tomb. One minute all had been well and the next minute the world had completely turned upside down. Now it was Sunday afternoon, the first day of the week. Passover and all of the terrible ciaos that went with it were over, and it was time to head out of Jerusalem and probably back home to where they came from. They had quite a walk ahead of them. They planned to put in nearly seven miles before they reached their place and stopped for the night, so while they walked, they talked, and as they talked they discussed all that they had experienced. They didn’t ask the stranger to join them on the walk, he just did, and as soon as he did he inserted himself into their conversation. “What are you talking about as you walk along?

I always think that it is interesting that the stranger—Jesus who has hidden from their eyes—asks them that question. Of all the people in the world, shouldn’t Jesus know exactly what they are talking about? I think he asks they question, because talking about our struggles and speaking them out loud is one of the ways that our heart processes things and begins to heal. On top of that, I also think that Jesus asks the question because he genuinely wants to hear how things are going from their perspective. “What are you talking about as you walk along?” Jesus asks, and as soon as the question is asked the disciples unload the story. The pain of watching Jesus die. The fear that the leaders of the synagogue might come after them and the other disciples next, and most importantly, the complete and utter disappointment that Jesus was gone, and all of their hopes and dreams were gone right along with him.

I imagine Jesus listening patiently, maybe asking a few more questions, and then as they walk, offering them a completely new perspective. After all, Cleopus and his friend, in their discouragement have missed a few things, and as Jesus opened the scriptures he offered them a new perspective full of new possibilities. They walked and talked together for seven miles, and when they had reached their evenings destination, they invited the stranger, their new friend to come in, eat and stay the night with them. That’s when it happened. That’s when they recognized him finally, the stranger was of course not a stranger. As soon as he took bread and blessed it, they recognized him. He was Jesus, the one who had taken bread, blessed it and fed people in body, mind, and spirit time and time again, and he had been with them the entire journey. He had been feeding their souls every step of the way. This good news could not be contained. Suddenly the weariness of the seven-mile journey disappeared, and they were off and running back to the disciples. Back to Jerusalem. Back to tell others that all was not lost. Jesus was alive.

Sometimes I am surprised by how little has changed in 2000 years. I can’t tell you friends; how many times Christ has found a way to speak to me as I have mauled over the struggles of my heart on a walk…or a road trip. Sometimes it is the peace and quiet of a run, and somewhere along the journey a new idea emerges and I have a direction of where to go next. Sometimes it is the process of talking things over with a friend, and through the conversation comes peace, love, and a hope that wasn’t there before. Sometimes it happens on a road trip when across the radio comes just the right song, or just the right word that I needed to hear. Are those moments simply a coincidence? Some would call them that I suppose, but I think scripture points us to a deeper truth. Our living Lord, loves us so much that he will not abandon us to walk through life alone—ever! God knows where we are heading, when we’ve steered off course, when we are grieving, discouraged, and struggling with direction, and in dying for our sins and rising from the dead he comes alongside us again and again so that we can know that we are forgiven, loved beyond measure, and never alone. We may not always recognize Christ in the middle of our struggles, but often if we look back on the journey we will discover moments when the Spirit of God was with us and somehow spoke to our heart…through a song, through a friend, through a sign that we glimpsed, through a feeling or a spark that came in the midst of prayer.

You may or may not know, that I do not readily embrace a change of plans! This journey through COVID has been hard on so many levels. Everyone’s experience with this has been different, and everyone’s struggles have been different as well. I think I have traveled from anger, to fear, to hope, to trying new things, and then back to do the entire cycle over again. One of my personal struggles is that every time I think I have found a “new stable,” plans change or something happens to make me doubt the direction--and yet time and time again, God has sent me you. You’ve sent text messages of encouragement. You’ve listened to me talk and offered good perspectives. You’ve told me you are praying. You’ve been forgiving and patient. You’ve been the body of Christ! The governor has said that we are about to see the light at the end of the tunnel in terms of worshipping apart. As he said this, community spread numbers of COVID in Lancaster County increased. The governor says that coming back together will essentially mean social distancing within the building together. Everyone six feet apart always, don’t touch anything or anybody, no hugs--maybe we should just try not to breathe when we are together. I have to tell you that well I was excited to read the governors news release on Friday, a part of me panicked a little because to be honest the thought of how to provide a meaningful worship while trying to continue to provide a safe worshipping environment given all that is, feels overwhelming. Then one of my friends sent me a text and said, “hang in there friend, we will get through this together.” Suddenly Christ had joined me on the journey again…although I know he has been there all along. “We will get through this together friend…yes…we will…because as isolated we have been we are NOT ALONE. Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, and he lives to see through each and every adventure! Amen. Thanks be to God.