

They Knew Him in the Breaking of the Bread

Luke 24:13-35

A sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter

What do we talk about when we get together? We talk about the weather. We talk about prices, gas prices, food prices. We talk about what's happening around us. Who has moved? We talk about unusual accidents. Have you heard? Did you know?

We know not to talk about politics and religion. Apart from those subjects, we basically talk about those things that are important. We're expecting a new baby. We have a new grandchild. So and so is taking a new job, was accepted at the college of his choice.

A young couple had a terrible fire that destroyed much of their home. The mother was quite distraught when carrying damaged furniture out of the house, she noticed that she had lost the diamond in her engagement ring. She was heartbroken. She looked everywhere but couldn't find it. Months later she was outside and saw something sparkle in the grass. It was the diamond!

It's like the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). The woman lit a lamp and swept the house. When she found the coin, she was so happy she called together her friends and neighbors and said, "Rejoice with me!" Her reaction is well described in a remarkable translation of Luke 6:45: "What the heart is full of, the mouth overflows with."

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter. Likely few of us have talked to others about what Easter means. To be sure, as we gather here for worship we are witnessing, we are saying publicly: "Rejoice! Our Redeemer lives!" Easter is the keystone, the critical, the major, the biggest, the only event that really matters.

In 2021 a California lottery winner won \$700 million. The resurrection is bigger.

Yet we tend to drift along. That's why it's good to have Mother's Day and Father's Day. We tend to take mothers and fathers for granted. But we also drift along about the center of our Christian faith, too. And we're not talking about something like "stopping to smell the roses."

Rather, it's like presenting to a two-year old your open hand which holds a shiny toy and in your other hand, a hundred-million-dollar uncut diamond. It doesn't look like much, but that doesn't matter! Which will the child pick? Of course the shiny toy.

We're that child, and it's time for us to grow up, wake up (1 Cor 3:1-2). This is more than the biggest lottery. More important than all the worries and troubles of the day. Death is conquered and everything is different.

Luke in chapter 24 has the remarkable account of two men taking a Sunday afternoon walk the same day as the resurrection. They are heading out to a little town about seven miles outside of Jerusalem (Emmaus). A stranger comes up next to them and asks: "What are you talking about?"

They say: "You must be the only one who doesn't know what's happened these past three days regarding Jesus of Nazareth. He was crucified, died, and was buried. We had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel. Some of our women went to his tomb this morning, but they couldn't find his body, and then there are rumors that he is alive." Then this unknown stranger opened up Scripture to show that it all points to him.

As they came to the end of the day, they said: "We better stop. Won't you stop with us?" He was going to go on, it seemed, but he said, "Yes." As they began their evening meal, he took charge and broke the bread and handed out the cup of wine, and then he suddenly disappeared.

How did they know him? Luke 24:16 says on the road they didn't know him because their eyes "were kept from recognizing him." That's like Acts 10:40-41: "God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." His appearance to the two men is not some normal kind of event.

Luke 24:32 says: "Their hearts burned within them." We must not be misled by that verse. Long ago a renowned preacher at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis preached on this verse: "Their hearts burned within them." His eloquent sermon was wrong. Yes, the text says "their hearts burned within them," but that's not what the passage is about – that your heart must burn within you, that you must have a feeling, or, if you get a feeling, it means you are one of the chosen. We may have lots of experiences in which "our hearts burn within us." A beautiful garden, the birth of a child, a winning lottery ticket, a graduation ceremony.

We always remember what Paul writes in 2 Cor 11:14: "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." We know that feelings, even joyous, uplifting feelings are not what it's about.

How did they know him? It's spelled out in Luke 24:35: "They knew him in the breaking of the bread." It means: "He presided." He took charge as he always did. And they knew him.

This message is the same as that given in 1 Peter 1:23, 25:

"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. . . . That word is the good news which was preached to you."

This is the Good News – that we have been born again through this Word, the Word of the Gospel that he is the one who is presiding and giving us life, and continues to do so.

It is the same as in John 6:51: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I give for the life of the world is my flesh."

"What the heart is full of, the mouth overflows with." Therefore we now sing: "I know that my Redeemer lives!"

"I know that my Redeemer lives!
What comfort this sweet sentence gives
He lives, he lives, who once was dead'
He lives, my ever-living head!

"He lives and grants me daily breath
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare,
He lives to bring we safely there.

"He lives all glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior, still the same;
What joy this blest assurance gives;
I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Amen