

What happened on the road

Luke 24:13-35

A sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter

What do we talk about when we get together? A group of older gentlemen who meet regularly for breakfast said: "We get together for an organ recital." My heart. His knees. When we get together, we talk about health or the weather. News of the day. Who has moved. 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.

A young couple had a terrible fire that destroyed much of their home. The wife was quite distraught when carrying damaged furniture out of the house. She noticed that she lost the diamond in her wedding ring. She was heartbroken. Months later she saw something sparkle in the grass. Amazingly, it was her 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. Since then, it's likely that few of us individually have said to others: "Have you heard? He is risen." And yet together we are doing this every Sunday as we proclaim publicly: "He is risen. He is risen indeed."

Christmas is big, but Easter is bigger. Easter is the singular event that changed heaven and earth.

Last December 2025, someone in Arkansas won a \$1.817 billion Powerball jackpot.

The resurrection is bigger.

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

We're like that child, easily distracted by shiny objects, as well as by all the worries and troubles of the day.

Yet he has conquered death is conquered, and that means everything is changed.

Luke 24 has the remarkable account of how on that first Easter, in the afternoon two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus about seven miles away. As they were walking, a stranger joins them and asks: "What are you talking about?"

They say: "Haven't you heard? You must be the only one who doesn't know what's happened these past 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 the tomb was empty; they couldn't find his body, and now there are rumors that he is alive."

Then this stranger interpreted the Scriptures for them, showing them how it all points to the events of the last three days.

As evening approached, they arrived in Emmaus and said to the stranger: "We're stopping here for the night. Won't you join us for Supper?"

He was going to go on, it seemed, but he said, "Yes." And so, they sat down together, and lo and behold, he took charge. He broke the bread and gave it to them. He took the wine and gave it to them. At that, they recognized him, and then he vanished.

They could hardly believe what had happened. Luke 24:16 says that while they were walking with him 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 disciples on the road to Emmaus was not some normal kind of event.

After recognizing him in the breaking of the bread, it says: "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us' while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

We must not be misled by this verse.

It's like what happened to a Lutheran woman in her neighborhood Bible study. When they were discussing this account and got to this verse, the Bible study leader asked that they each think of a time when their "hearts burned within them," a time when they really felt the presence of God or had what seemed to be a religious experience. She hadn't had such an experience; she didn't know what to say.

She was, in fact, righter than she realized, because 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 or experience, you can be sure God speaking to you.

To be sure, we may have experiences in which "our hearts burn within us." Seeing a beautiful garden, the birth of a child, a winning lottery ticket, a graduation ceremony.

It's wonderful to feel uplifted by beauty, love, and joy. Yet feelings come and go.

We know, too, as Paul writes in 2 Cor 11:14: "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Religious experiences, like angels of light, can deceive us.

Our situation is like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "They knew him in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35). It means: "He presided." He took charge as he always did. He took care of the problem, and he is living now and presides over the distribution of his inheritance—wherever two or three are gathered in his name, wherever his Word is proclaimed and his sacraments administered.

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."

We have been born anew through the Word of the cross and resurrection. He is the one who is presiding and giving us life, and he 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."

Amen