

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**April 19 & 20, 2014**  
**John Crosby**  
**To All the World Glad News We Bring!**  
**Luke 24:13-35**

Will you rise, please, for the hearing of the Gospel story.

Luke says the women found the tomb empty and told the disciples.

**13** That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village called Emmaus. It was about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15** As they talked about those things, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. **16** But God kept them from recognizing him. **17** Jesus asked them, "What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stood still, and their faces were sad. **18** One of them was named Cleopas. He said to Jesus, "You must be a visitor to Jerusalem. If you lived there, you would know the things that have happened there in the last few days." **19** "What things?" Jesus asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet. He was powerful in what he said and did in the eyes of God and all of the people. **20** The chief priests and our rulers handed Jesus over to be sentenced to death. They nailed him to a cross. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to set Israel free.

Also, it is the third day since all this happened. **22** "Some of our women amazed us too. Early this morning they went to the tomb. **23** But they didn't find his body. So they came and told us what they had seen. They saw angels, who said Jesus was alive. **24** Then some of our friends went to the tomb. They saw it was empty, just as the women had said. They didn't see Jesus' body there."

**25** Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are! How long it takes you to believe all that the prophets said! **26** Didn't the Christ have to suffer these things and then receive his glory?" **27** Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures. He began with Moses and all the Prophets. **28** The two men approached the village where they were going. Jesus acted as if he were going farther. **29** But they tried hard to keep him from leaving. They said, "Stay with us. It is nearly evening. The day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. **30** He joined them at the table. Then he took bread and gave thanks. He broke it and began to give it to them. **31** Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. But then he disappeared from their sight.

**32** They said to each other, "He talked with us on the road. He opened the Scriptures to us. Weren't our hearts burning inside us during that time?" **33** They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them. They were all gathered together. **34** They were saying, "It's true! The Lord has risen! [Luke 24:13-34]"

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.

Easter is about miracles and confusion and doubt and mistaken identities. We live in a world that loves the stories of mistaken identities. There is even a new TV series that's out, Prince Harry look-alikes. Who would believe it? I have a very good friend who looked so much like another famous person that, literally, whenever he went to Colorado, people would come up and badger him for his autograph. He finally started signing so that people would not think John Denver was a jerk. We have undercover bosses who show what it's like when we go underground. The mother of Lindsey Vonn, the championship skier, is a member here. She says everybody recognizes Lindsey on the slopes and on skis, but the other day, Lindsey worked as a trainee and sold lipstick at Vail and not one person recognized her. Later, they were all angry that they had missed recognizing and talking to Lindsey Vonn.

Easter is about mistaken identity and surprises, and it is supposed to be a surprise, otherwise it just turns into a religious Easter parade. From the very beginning, the Gospel meant good news because it tells us things we don't expect, that we aren't inclined to believe and cannot understand. That's the news. Did we really expect that if the Creator of the whole universe told us some news, it would be something we could have dreamed up for ourselves?

Certainly the first followers of Jesus had no clue. They just did not understand. Today's story is about two of them here on the road to Emmaus. We don't know a thing about Emmaus, where it was or why this little village was important to these two who were going there. Maybe they were going home after watching Jesus die. Maybe they were afraid to stay in Jerusalem and so they were hiding out. We really don't know, but the text tells us exactly how far Emmaus is from Jerusalem. It's seven miles away, an afternoon's walk. So apparently Emmaus is a place to go and get away from your disappointment. Emmaus is where you go and where I go when we have to get away because the person or the event or the thing we were counting on has let us down. Maybe the road to Emmaus is the road back home. Maybe the disappointment is on the road back to work or to a new job. Maybe Emmaus leads to a church that lets you down. It doesn't need to be very far away. It's only about seven miles away from your last disappointment, probably less than seven miles to your next disappointment. It's the road that we all spend a lot of time on, the road to Emmaus.

What makes this journey different is that it says that Jesus joined them on the road to disappointment, on the road to Emmaus. The power of Easter is that somehow Jesus is supposed to join us on the road. The most striking thing about the appearances of Jesus after His Resurrection is that nobody recognizes Him. Mary thinks He is just a gardener in the cemetery. Peter is out fishing and he thinks that Jesus is just some guy on the shore asking if he is catching anything, and Cleopas here on the road thinks that this is just a stranger making idle conversation. Even today I don't know that it's that much different. I don't know how the stranger on the road may first appear to you, but **if it's the risen Christ, He won't appear the way that you expect.**

The strangest thing of all about the risen Savior is that He doesn't save the day in the nick of time as we had hoped. You know, the way the hero in the story does, just in the nick of time. Well, this time, He doesn't show up. Easter proclaims a hope that appears after the nick of time has come and gone. Cleopas and his friend were on the road because they had suffered crushing loss. They had heard some unbelievable, confusing stories from the women about an empty tomb, and angels telling them Jesus was alive, but looking right at Jesus they said, "But

none of us have seen Him.” That’s when the stranger gives us the first hint about how you see Jesus on the road. The stranger comes up and turns to them saying, “You idiots, you fools.” That’s our first hint to seeing Jesus walk with us on the road.

Clearly Jesus never went to seminary. In seminary we learned that we need to be empathetic, reflective listeners, “This is what I hear you saying in your crisis.” We’re supposed to be encouraging, “Oh, that’s an interesting idea. (That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.)” “Well, we can talk about that question later.” Jesus doesn’t do any of that. Jesus says, “Hey, it’s foolish. It’s foolish not to see the hope written down in the Scriptures.” Jesus reminds them that the promise of the prophets was never that the Messiah was there to restore their dreams. The Messiah had not come to bring the good life to His followers. What the prophets promised was that the Messiah would come and the Messiah would die. Then, after all the plans that I have for God in my life, that you have for the good things God is supposed to do for you, after all those dreams die, only then do people on the road see Jesus rise from the dead and catch a glimpse of Him, just a glimpse, offering a new way to live that could only come from heaven.

First, it’s about the death and only then, life. These men on the road are trying to make sense out of the disappointment that comes to every human being, the disappointment and the fear that comes to you. Just like us, they are on this road because they don’t have the big story. They think life is just about the last good time they had or the big disappointment or the fear that’s just ahead as they bounce from despair to hope to joy. There is no big picture. What Jesus says is, “Hey, idiots. It’s all written down here. There’s a *big story* that you’re missing and you are part of the big story. He opens the Book and it says the story starts when God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.”

“You could be part of the story,” Jesus says, “if you are like Moses and all those Hebrew slaves who see Pharaoh’s army coming at them as they are at the edge of the Red Sea and all of a sudden, the earth shatters and they walk on the water. You could believe that you are part of the same story that let the apostle Paul sit in jail and believe that if he dies with Christ, then he will rise with Christ. Or, you could believe if you are like Cleopas and the stranger, that Jesus would come up to you today and say, “Join Me. Join Me in the story.” Then you wouldn’t have to bounce around between disappointment and the consumption of the next thing that is sure to change everything, living a little lie. We live in little lies that end in little deaths. Instead, you might have a death-defying, life-giving hope no matter how many days you have left. You could be a person who gets caught up in looking for Jesus and walking down that road, see Christ’s mission to the world fulfilled.

According to Jesus, to get a glimpse of Him, you have to know the story of the Scriptures because after you’ve caught a glimpse of Him on the road, life is never supposed to be the same. So that’s the first hint to seeing Jesus walk with us on the road. We get glimpses of Jesus in the Scripture. Here is the second hint. At Easter, Jesus does not answer everybody’s questions. They have all kinds of questions. He stays with them and tells them a story, and then He feeds them and as He feeds them, they start to remember that just 70 or 72 hours before, “We had a meal just like this, didn’t we?” He takes the Bread and He blesses it and He breaks it and says to them, “**Do this to remember Me. When you do this, you will recognize Me.**” So when we walk on the road together, when we come to this place together and gather around His meal and see Him lifted up, we catch glimpses of Jesus.

Let me give you the last hint for seeing Jesus even on Easter. A friend of mine named Mike, he's been coming here about 12 years now, he started coming when he was not a Christian. He was not a follower of Jesus but his wife was and he came to me and said, "I'm here because my wife says I need to do something because I'm so angry." I said, "Why are you mad?" and he goes, "Well, I was part of a firm that was a start-up and it did really well and in the last couple of months, we had an IPO and now they're buying us out for millions and millions." "And I said, "Whoa! Sounds bad." He says, "No, no, no, you don't understand. My boss promised me *this* and I'm only getting *this*." He goes, "I know, I know. It's far more than I ever thought I'd get five years ago but he promised me. Why am I so angry? Why do I feel so empty with all that I've gotten? I don't believe but let's talk."

And over the weeks that followed, Mike and some of our friends read the Scriptures together and asked a lot of questions. Mike came to me one day and said, "Yeah, I've seen Him. I believe in Jesus now. I believe that Jesus has forgiven me for being such a schmuck and He wants me to learn to forgive my boss." Then Mike goes out and he doesn't start another company. He doesn't join a big company. He doesn't bank his money. He goes to an organization here the cities called Twin Cities RISE! and becomes their director. This an organization that tries to give convicted felons, primarily African-American men who don't even know how to work, the first job they've ever had in their lives. He said, "John, when I go there during the day and I try to teach these guys how to put on a tie and they turn sideways, I swear, John, I can see Jesus. How is that?" I said to Mike, "It's because you found that part of the story where Jesus says, "You fed Me and you clothed Me and you visited Me." And the people, His followers, will say, "When did we see You?" and He will say, "When you fed the hungry and you clothed the naked and you visited the prisoner, you were helping Me." **We see glimpses of Jesus when we serve.**

I love the way the story in our Scripture ends. It ends very realistically. It says the men returned from Emmaus with all the others and Jesus Himself is suddenly standing there. He says, "Peace be with you." The whole group is startled and frightened. This was just after they had been talking about Him and they thought they were still seeing a ghost. They were confused. Some days so am I and I bet, some days so are you. The great gift of Easter is that it's challenging to believe. The gift of Easter is that you are going to get it wrong and that's okay. It's not about you. It's okay to have doubts because it's not about you. As a matter of fact, Matthew's story about this says, "When they saw Jesus, they worshipped Him but some doubted." Just one long sentence, all at the same time.

How about you? Do you ever struggle with that? Do you ever wonder if you're having trouble seeing the real Jesus in your heart by faith? Do you ever feel like somehow you're out on that road to Emmaus disappointed with your faith? Welcome to the community. We want to be a community that celebrates life and acknowledges doubt. We want to be a community that looks at questions and isn't afraid when we have doubts about the most important things in life and addresses those doubts and questions without pretense or faking it. May I just for one minute show you what that might look like?

[Video is shown.]

Next week and for the three weeks after that, we want to talk about that part of the story. "Some saw Him and worshipped Him and some doubted." Maybe everybody doubts some time. Why don't you come back next week, and if you have a friend who has questions or doubts, maybe

you could bring that friend? Right now they are on the road to Emmaus. Remember Easter is the day when you don't have to get it all right. The resurrection proves the power of grace. It shows that love never stops giving, that the risen Christ comes on the road us. We all need help. We all need help seeing Jesus on the road.

The early church used to make up stories that would talk about the Jesus people saw on the road. One of those stories early on said that one day the devil decided to sneak into heaven. He gets a bunch of demons, disguises them as angels and comes to the gates of heaven. He knocks and says, "Let me in." Now you guys know that it says that the devil knows Scripture and so he shouts out the words of Psalm 24.

<sup>9</sup> Lift up your heads, O gates!  
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!  
that the King of glory may come in.

Well, the angel guards are thrilled that their King, who they thought was dead, is outside the gates and they call out the next line in the Psalm.

<sup>10</sup> Who is this King of glory?

And the devil stretches wide his arms and says, "I am like Jesus. I am." Looking down from the walls, the angels see the devil's hands and know that this is not the King of glory. The only one who can open the gates of heaven to you still bears the scars of love on His hands. This side of the cross, this side of the tomb, we need to know that our hope is not to avoid loss or doubt or death. Our hope rises from the dead.

Lord Jesus, You started out Your sermon by saying, "Blessed are the poor." Well, blessed are the liars and blessed are the doubters. Blessed today are the fakers and the thieves and the lusters. Blessed are those overcome by depression or anger or grief. Blessed are those who walk on the road. Like that woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair in gratitude or these men who got a glimpse of Jesus alive on the road. When God has made us right, we have more to rejoice. We were deep in doubt and far down the road of disappointment, but our Savior came back for us. He is alive, and now we are free to follow. Lord Jesus, make our hearts burn within us like on that day so long ago and meet us on the road of eternal life. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*