



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Known in the Breaking of the Bread

Luke 24:28-35

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As we come this morning to within just a few verses of the end of Luke's Gospel I want to talk a little about beginnings and endings. Here at the end of the Gospel account Luke uses two elements of the story to remind us where things began, where things started, in order to tell us what Jesus has accomplished. It's hard to appreciate the solution to a problem when you don't know or when you've forgotten what the problem was. Sometimes we do that with the Gospel, with the Good News—we know it's "good", but we can't say exactly why. Last week I talked about living in the story, but sometimes we forget what the story is. And so here at the end of the story Luke reminds of the beginning and of the problem Jesus came to solve, so that we can understand the full significance of what he's done. Brothers and Sisters, the better we understand what Jesus has done, the stronger our faith will be, the greater our joy, the more profound our understanding of the love and mercy and grace and righteousness of God, and the better we will understand how to proclaim and to live the reality of the Good News.

As I said last week, we're breaking into several sermons what Luke presents in one "chapter", so today we're jumping into the middle of it. It began with two of Jesus disciples on the first Easter morning as they left Jerusalem for the town of Emmaus seven miles away. One of them was named Cleopas and, if he's the same person whom John calls

Clopas, his companion was probably his wife, Mary. It had been three days since Jesus had been crucified. The disciples were confused and dejected. The Messiah was supposed to vanquish the Romans, not die at their hands. They had heard the report of the empty tomb and of the angels saying that Jesus was alive, but no one believed the women who told that story. Peter had run to see for himself. Sure enough it was empty, but they just couldn't believe the story that Jesus had risen from the dead. They did believe in the resurrection of the dead—*someday*. But the idea that one person would be raised from the dead before everyone else, that the Romans would carry on with their empire—that wasn't what anyone expected. It didn't fit their theology. It didn't fit their outline of the "end times" as some might say today. And so they were ready to give up on Jesus. Cleopas and his companion had stay in Jerusalem those three days, but now they were going home to resume the life they'd left when they took up with Jesus.

As we read last week, it was as they left Jerusalem that Jesus met them on the road. They didn't recognise him, but they did listen to him and he spent the journey walking them through the Scriptures. Luke says that "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Jesus himself took them all the way back to the beginning of the story and showed how all of Scripture—not just a few prophetic or allegorical prooftexts, but all of the Old Testament—pointed to him. Jesus was the end goal all along. He is Israel's representative and in him all of God's promises to her are fulfilled; in him her history and mission are fulfilled and reach their climax. Somehow they still didn't recognise Jesus and yet there was

something about him. When they reached their destination at Emmaus, they weren't ready to part ways. We now pick up there at Luke 24:28.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. (Luke 24:28-29)

We should know by now that Luke's signalling that something significant is about to happen. Whenever Jesus is shown hospitality he always ends up himself taking on the role of the host and in the Gospel hospitality always becomes an opportunity for revelation, for Jesus to make himself known. That's just what happens. Somehow they've been unable to recognise him all day. Somehow they've had the Scriptures unfolded, but it's only now that it all sinks in, it's only now that they finally understand. Luke writes:

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. (Luke 24:30-31)

Now they finally recognise Jesus and they recognise him in the action of breaking bread. It was an action they had no doubt seen him take many times. It was an action they had seen him take when he fed the crowd of thousands—over and over, breaking those five loaves of bread and somehow the pieces fed the crowd with baskets and baskets left to spare. That action embodied Jesus ministry: feeding the hungry. That action embodied his sacrifice as he told his friends in the Upper Room: this is my body broken for you. Cleopas hadn't been there, but the other disciples had, no doubt,

told them about that last supper as they all tried to sort out what had happened. That action of breaking bread embodied the goodness of God in Jesus as he, the shepherd, fed his lambs. And so finally their eyes are opened; finally they recognise him. Luke says: “and their eyes were opened”.

And that phrase takes us back from this last meal of the Gospel to the first meal described in Genesis, back at the very beginning of the story. Luke uses exactly the same phrase used in the Greek version of Genesis 3:7: “and their eyes were opened”. The serpent lied to Eve; he told her that if she ate of the fruit of the tree she could be like God. The fruit looked good to eat, so she took it and ate it. She gave some of it to Adam, and he ate it. And their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked. That first meal recorded in Scripture describes our rebellion against God. That first meal subjected not only humanity, but all of Creation to sin and death.

The serpent came to Adam and Eve. He twisted the Word of God and persuaded them to rebel and in that rebellion he subjected them to sin and death. And yet here we see the Lord’s Messiah coming to these two disciples, to this couple who are probably husband and wife. On the road to Emmaus, for those seven miles, he spoke the Word of God to them, not twisting it this time, but *untwisting* it for them—extracting the lies of the serpent, and revealing its truth, revealing how he himself is at the heart of it from beginning to end, and then he took bread, blessed it, and gave it to them to eat and, just like Adam and Eve, their eyes were opened. But this time as their eyes are opened they see that Jesus has undone the curse introduced by Adam and Eve. In his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated

death and he has defeated sin—he has crushed the head of the serpent. Jesus has brought life where there was death. Jesus has brought redemption and has inaugurated a new kingdom, a new Creation.

It’s puzzling why at that very moment, just as these two disciples recognise Jesus that he vanishes. Just at the moment that their eyes are opened to see him he disappears from their sight. Jesus leaves, he vanishes, but the sense of the Greek word Luke uses is that he became “invisible”—that they could no longer see him. It seems counter-intuitive on the surface, but it highlights something else about Jesus’ resurrection that is vitally important. There were other people who had been raised from the dead. Elijah and Elisha had each raised young men who had died. Jesus had raised another widow’s son, he had raised Jairus’ daughter, he had raised Lazarus from the grave. In that sense, resurrection was exceedingly *rare*, but it wasn’t new or unheard of. But none of those resurrections inaugurated a new Creation. They pointed to it. They gave a foretaste of what God had planned. But all of these people died again. When they were raised from the dead they were the same old selves they had always been, with the same old bodies that would one day get sick or grow old and die. Something very different had happened to Jesus. The tomb was empty, which tells us that it was the same Jesus with the same body who had been raised from the dead, but his amazing disappearance here reveals that he has changed. On the one hand he’s still just like us. He shares a meal with his friends, here eating bread with them; in John’s Gospel eating freshly-caught fish with them on the beach. And yet he’s not like us: in an instant he vanishes—now you see him and now you don’t. In the next section of the

story—next week—he somehow ascends on the clouds to heaven, to God’s realm. Luke drives home a vitally important point: the resurrected Jesus is as at home in heaven as he is on earth. And that highlights the nature of the new Creation he has inaugurated. In that first meal in which Adam and Eve rebelled heaven and earth were sundered. Humanity, created to live in the presence of God, was cast out of the garden. In the temple God provided a reminder of what he had originally intended for his people: to live in his presence. But in the temple there was also a reminder: sin keeps us out. Human rebellion, human sin has sundered heaven and earth, has sundered our realm and God’s. But here we get a sense of what Jesus accomplished. He didn’t just rise from the dead to die again; he rose from the dead to a new kind of life. He rose from the dead in such a way that in him earth and heaven are rejoined and in him, in his resurrection, in his life we have a foretaste of the New Jerusalem, of the new creation, of earth and heaven rejoined, of humanity once again living in the presence of God. Jesus has gone first; where he has led we will one day follow if we live in him by faith. This is what St. Paul means when he talks about being “in Christ”. He is our life and he is our hope.

And, Brothers and Sisters, Luke’s story here reminds us how we know about this hope. First, look at verse 33:

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?”

It was the faithful expositions of the Scriptures, not a proof-texting of this or that passage, but the story taken as a whole from Genesis through the

Prophets—the big picture—that revealed Jesus as both the centre of the story and the climax of the story. And it wasn't just faithful exposition, but Jesus himself. And, Brothers and Sisters, Jesus continues to do the same thing for us. The New Testament—the Spirit-inspired record left for us by the Evangelists and the Apostles—today tells *us* Israel's story, shows *us* Jesus as the climax of it, and puts *us* in the middle of it as the New Israel so that we, his people, can live in that story in life and in hope.

The second thing Jesus points to here is that we know him not only through the Word, but in the breaking of bread. As he wrote these words, Luke had to have had in mind the meal that was at the heart of Christian worship—the Lord's Supper. Jesus has ascended to his heavenly throne, but in the continued breaking of bread he is present with his people. Christians have argued and fought over exactly how Jesus is present, but the point is that in some mystical way he is. It might help to remember again what I said his sudden disappearance tells us: he is as at home in heaven as he is on earth, but the Lord's supper reminds us as well that he is at home on earth as he is in heaven. Even when we can't see him, he is present with us. He is our source of life. He is the vine and we are the branches. We were once dead wood, but we have been grafted into him and he restores us to life. When we come to his Table to eat the bread and drink the wine this is what he reminds us—that even though we can't ordinarily see him, he is with us always, transforming, giving life, giving hope.

So Word and Sacrament, together—heart and mind, together—bring us to Jesus. The Word without the Sacrament, like the mind without the

heart, becomes an intellectual exercise and the Sacrament without the Word, like the heart without the mind, becomes superstitious ritual. But together they bring us to Jesus. At different times in history Christians have sometimes been prone to forgetting either heart or mind. Today a lot of people are hungry for that burning in their bosom that Luke writes about here, but they want it apart from the Word. Maybe it's because of too many theologians who turned Bible study into little more than an academic exercise, some of whom undermined the Scriptures themselves that we've turned now to a sort of anti-intellectualism. In many cases it's our modern culture of instant gratification—we want Jesus, we want assurance, we want knowledge *right now*, forget the long and hard work of knowing the Scriptures. It's common to hear people say that God wants your heart, not your mind or that God works through the heart and the head only gets in the way. But, Brothers and Sisters, remember that it was the *Word* of God who became incarnate in Jesus—the Word, not the “emotion” of God, not the “urge” of God. It was the Word, because words carry rational, intellectual, and intelligible content capable of revealing a knowledge of God that other means never can in the same way. It doesn't take a great intellect to hear and to understand the Word. Some have great minds and others do not, but God has given every person a mind capable of the task of hearing and understanding his Word. It's part of our human makeup—part of how he Created us so that we can know him, hear him, and obey him. The Holy Spirit regenerates our hearts, turning them to Jesus, but that same Spirit also renews our minds that we might hear his Word and understand it, so that our hearts can then “do” it. Again, Jesus makes

himself known through both heart and mind, through both Word and Sacrament. Separate them, reject one or the other, and you're guaranteed to stray.

So Luke shows us Jesus as the culmination, the climax of Israel's story. Here in this last meal of the Gospel we see Jesus revealed as the one who has fixed, who has redeemed, who is making new what was broken and what died in that first meal at the beginning of the story. But he also bookends his own story—the story of Jesus himself—here at the end. Luke began his account of Jesus' ministry with a story of Jesus as a young boy getting “lost” in the temple. Jesus had realised, at least to some extent, who he was and so, when his family went to the Jerusalem for the Passover, he went to learn from the teachers there. He wanted to understand the Scriptures in which he was seeing himself as the fulfilment. He became so engrossed in that discussion that he stayed behind as Mary and Joseph left for home. Luke tells us that for three days they searched for him before finally finding him in the temple. And remember Jesus rebuke to them: “Why were you looking for me everywhere? Did you not know that I would be about my Father's business?” That's how his ministry began. And now, here at the end, we see the disciples perplexed, worried, confused, angry, grief-stricken for three days as they wondered what had happened to Jesus. Why had he died? Where had his body gone? The angels even told them, but they couldn't understand. And now, here, he unfolds the Scriptures to his disciples, making them clear, explaining his place. As they grieve the loss of their Lord, as the wonder in confusion what has happened to him he comes to them on the road, he comes to them in the breaking of

bread and says again, “Did you not know that I would be about my Father’s business?”

This is what the cross and the empty tomb are about. While the disciples were confused, angry, and despairing Jesus was about his Father’s business, breaking the cords of death and of sin that he might rise on Easter and lead his people into new life and new creation. And with this sinking in, Cleopas and his companion realise that the story isn’t over; they need to return to Jerusalem and to the other disciples. Luke goes on:

And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:33-35)

They didn’t wait until morning. That very hour they left Emmaus and travelled seven miles back to Jerusalem. Everyone was wondering what had happened and now they knew. Once you realise Jesus was at the centre of it all along it all makes sense. No, the story didn’t end with Jesus death; the cross and the empty tomb are just the beginning. And when they get back to Jerusalem they find that Peter has had a similar encounter with Jesus and that he now understands too. Luke probably makes a point of telling us about Peter in preparation for telling us about Peter’s leadership in the book of Acts. He was the one who denied and abandoned Jesus, but Jesus hasn’t denied or abandoned him. It’s a hopeful reminder to us of just how amazing Jesus’ work of forgiveness and renewal is—even extending to,

reaching out to a friend who denied him in his hour of greatest need. Forgiveness, redemption, regeneration, and restoration are available to any and to all who will hear the story and, in faith, choose to live in it.

This was—this *is*—the new exodus. As the Lord through Moses parted the waters of sea and gave Israel an escape from certain death, so the Lord through Jesus has parted death itself and given a route of escape from it and from the sin that put us in bondage to death in the first place. Brothers and Sisters, like Israel travelling through the wilderness to the promised land with the Lord tabernacling in her midst, Jesus now leads us through the wilderness to the New Jerusalem, and yet as we travel he calls us to look around us and to see the wilderness being made new. Not only that, where we see it still in rebellion and in decay, he calls us to preach the good news that death and sin have been defeated. Israel passed through the wilderness, but now Jesus is transforming that wilderness and he calls us to be, ourselves, part of that process of transformation, giving life, showing justice and mercy, making peace—proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and calling all to repent for his kingdom. As Jesus told it on the road to Emmaus, he now calls us to tell the story of redemption from beginning to end—the story in which he is beginning and end and centre. Friends, if that seems like an impossible task, come to the Lord’s Table this morning and be strengthened and renewed; be reminded that Jesus is with us, that he is our life, and that he is our hope. Then go forth in pace to love and to serve in his name.

Let us pray: Gracious Father, as we asked in the Collect we ask again: for grace to put off the works of

darkness and to put on the armour of light as we prepare for your Son’s return. Strengthen, encourage, enlighten us as we immerse ourselves in your Word and as we eat at your Table. Regenerate our hearts and renew our minds. Prepare and equip us to tell the story of Jesus, our Saviour and Lord, to make him and his kingdom known and be at work we pray in the hearts and minds that surround us that they might see you in us, that they might hear and understand the Good News we proclaim. We ask this through Jesus our Lord. Amen.