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May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!
 Luke 24:13-35

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise!

Dear friends with whom our risen Lord also walks and talks along the way,

The congregation in which I served as Vicar thirty-some years ago, in Phoenix, Arizona, is named Emmaus. There are other congregations, though not that many, which are also named Emmaus. At first, this may seem like a strange name for a congregation - - "Emmaus." It is only mentioned this one time in the whole Bible; just a small village; not a well-known place at all, for Luke feels constrained to tell his audience that it is seven miles from Jerusalem, otherwise we would have no idea where it was. Even still, we aren't sure which direction it was from Jerusalem.

Emmaus -- a strange name for a church? Not really. It's the place where our risen Lord appeared to two of his disciples, the place where he walked and talked with them, explaining the Scriptures to them, so that their hearts burned within them. Emmaus is the place where those two disciples said to their Lord, "Stay with us." It's the place where, when Jesus sat down, gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him as their risen Savior. Such close fellowship with the Lord is what a congregation is all about, whether the congregation bears the name Emmaus or not. This heart-warming, heart-burning, account is for every congregation, for every disciple of the Lord. Jesus Opens The Eyes Of The Emmaus Disciples.

Those two disciples did not know what it was all about, as they walked from Jerusalem toward Emmaus that Easter Sunday afternoon. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened, everything that had happened to Jesus; how his ministry had come to such a sudden and tragic end; condemned, crucified and buried. And now there were all these "rumors" about his body being gone, and the women seeing a vision of angels who said he was alive. They didn't know what to think, or what to believe. Like Thomas, they were doubters, who wanted proof positive. They walked along, sad, troubled and confused, their faces downcast, probably arguing about that was true and what was not. And as they walked along, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him. What kept them from recognizing Jesus? Surely his glorious resurrected body looked different from his body of humiliation that they had been accustomed to seeing before. But mainly it was their own doubts and lack of faith that kept them from recognizing Jesus. He was the last

person they expected to see, and their sadness scarcely permitted them to lift up their heads and look him in the eye.

Jesus did not open their eyes and reveal his identity to them immediately. He didn't say, "Hey, I'm Jesus; I'm alive!" No, before opening their physical eyes, Jesus wanted first to open their spiritual eyes of faith in him as their living Savior. After they understood and believed God's plan of salvation through the suffering and death of Jesus, and God's sure promises of the resurrection, then they would be ready for that absolute proof from their physical eyes. So for now Jesus played the part of the stranger they thought him to be.

After those disciples did recognize Jesus, how foolish they must have felt as they thought back to their walk with that stranger. Along that road they expressed their doubts and unbelief in the resurrection and in Jesus as their Savior, but Jesus was walking right beside them. They expressed sadness, fears, troubles, what they thought were unsolvable problems, and the whole time, the risen Lord Jesus was right beside them. How silly! How could they have failed to recognize him?

But sometimes we make that same mistake. You see, Jesus is also at our side at all times, even during pandemic lockdowns and social distancing mandates. Oh, we don't see him with our physical eyes walking with us, just as those disciples didn't recognize that stranger, but he is with us just the same, and we should recognize his presence through the eyes of faith. The problem is when doubts, worries, fears and sadness set in, and keep us from recognizing our Lord there with us, and he so easily looks like a stranger. Still he is there, in spite of our failures to recognize him. What a privilege for those Emmaus disciples to have that special walk with Jesus. What a privilege for us to walk life's road with our risen Savior at our side.

After walking with the two disciples for a time, overhearing their conversation, the stranger asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" And they stopped, as one would when interrupted, and interrupted by such an out-of-place question. Surely this unknown companion should have picked up on the conversation by now, and surely everyone knows about the things that have happened to Jesus. So one of the disciples named Cleopas replied, "Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" Jesus asked. You see, Jesus wanted them to state those events that had happened to their Savior, surely not for his own information or benefit, but for theirs. Jesus knew well what had happened, and why. It was the disciples who were confused about the events. Jesus wanted them to express their thoughts concerning what had happened, to get their fears, their doubts, their unbelief out in the open, so that he could explain what really had happened, and why, and thus open their eyes of faith.

Their response showed their lack of faith: "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Now they doubted that Jesus was their Redeemer. "And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said." All these "rumors!" But why didn't these

disciples believe these things? These were clear evidences of the resurrection, and how many times had Jesus explained to his followers that he would rise from the dead? They state the reason for their doubts: "But Jesus they did not see." They wanted a visible appearance of the resurrected Jesus before they would believe his promises. These disciples were relying only on what they saw. But just now they weren't seeing too clearly.

Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Then Jesus began his Bible study class with the two disciples. He opened the Scriptures to them and showed them how the Old Testament clearly foretold again and again those things that would happen to the Savior, those things that they had witnessed the past few days. No, nothing had gone wrong with God's plan of salvation. Everything was as it had to be. These things had to take place. In this way Jesus comforted and reassured those disciples, and built them up in their faith, in their trust in himself as their Savior, and in their confidence in his resurrection. He opened their eyes of faith, even though they still didn't know who he was.

It would be interesting to know just what passages Jesus used from the Old Testament, but we are not told, and the Old Testament is so full of passages describing Christ's work of salvation that we can hardly guess. What we are told is that Jesus used the word of God, the Bible, to comfort and strengthen those disciples, to open their eyes of faith, to make their hearts burn within them. Jesus didn't waste time arguing and trying to prove the resurrection apart from Scripture. He went right to the Bible and simply stated, "This is what God says." That is why Jesus did not reveal his identity right away, so that he could first open the Scriptures to them. Those disciples thought Jesus was an ignorant stranger, but as it turned out, he knew a lot more than they did. They were the ones who were ignorant, not seeing straight.

What great honor and authority Jesus bestows upon Scripture, that he himself uses them alone. We too should be diligent in our study and use of Scriptures. It's basically a waste of time for us to debate or argue matters of faith with others apart from God's word. It's a waste of time for us to try to prove the resurrection or any other matter of faith apart from God's word. God says, and that's all the proof we need. If those disciples had been studying the Scriptures, instead of discussing the events and trying to reason them out with each other, they might well have avoided their lack of faith. Jesus turned them back to God's word where they should have been all along. It is just as important for us to be in that word.

Soon their walk with Jesus was almost over. As they came to Emmaus, Jesus, still playing the part of the stranger, acted as if he were going farther, but the two disciples urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. Oh, the hymns that have been penned from this verse. Perhaps the most familiar is the well-known hymn "Abide With Me! Fast Falls The Eventide," and there are many others. Two disciples invite a stranger to stay with them, a stranger who had helped them in their time of sadness and need, who had comforted and strengthened them with God's word along the way. Unknowingly, they invited the Lord himself to be their guest.

And the Lord soon became their host. At the dinner table with them, he took bread, broke it and began to give it to them. How many times had those disciples seen

Jesus break bread like this before? The feeding of the 5000, the feeding of the 4000, the many times he ate, even with tax collectors and sinners, the Last Supper. And even though Jesus was apparently not celebrating the Lord's Supper with these disciples here, still there is a parallel. As we receive the Lord's Supper, our faith recognizes him as the living Lord, who is with us on our way, as he was with these disciples. Even beyond that, our risen and living Lord gives us his very body and blood in the sacrament for our forgiveness.

When Jesus broke the bread, the eyes of the disciples were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. Jesus, no longer a stranger, had opened the eyes of the Emmaus disciples. How amazed they must have been to have seen the risen Savior. How amazed they must have been at their own lack of faith for not recognizing him earlier. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

By now it was evening; the day was over; the time for traveling was over. But with hearts burning with joy and faith, with eyes wide open, those disciples got up and at once traveled all the way back to Jerusalem. They had to share their faith, their joy, their excitement. They found the other disciples gathered together, but even before the two got a chance to tell their exciting news, the others told their news to the two: "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." What a happy gathering this must have been, the disciples rejoicing together in their risen Lord.

Our congregation too is just such a gathering where we rejoice in our risen Lord, strengthening and encouraging one another. There are some similarities between Emmaus and our congregation; a small place, hardly known nation wide. But it's a place where Jesus walks with his disciples, the place where he opens the Scriptures to us, driving away our doubts and fears, causing our hearts to burn within us, opening our eyes to see him, our risen Savior. Grace Lutheran Church and St. Paul's Lutheran Church, like Emmaus, is the place where Jesus' disciples say, "Stay with us!"

Amen.

May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us or forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways. Amen.