

## **An Evening Walk with Jesus**

*Sermon preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast*

*Olentangy Church*

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### **Luke 24:13-35**

*Here's how Luke tells it: On Friday Jesus is dead and buried. Saturday is a day of rest. Then, on Sunday morning, the tomb is empty, and Jesus himself is nowhere to be found.*

The same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were having a conversation about everything that had happened. While they were talking it over, Jesus himself came along and joined them on the way, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. He said to them, "What's this you're discussing while you walk?" They stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him, "Are you the only person living near Jerusalem who doesn't know what's happened there lately?" "What?" he asked them.

They said to him, "About Jesus from Nazareth, a prophet who spoke and acted with power in the sight of God and all the people, and how our chief priests and other leaders handed him over for execution — and they crucified him. We were hoping he was the one who would redeem Israel. But along with all this, it's the third day now since it happened, and some women from our group have confused us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and when they didn't find his body, they came back saying they had seen angels in a vision, who say he's alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it the way the women had said. But him they did not see."

Then he said to them, "You dimwits! How slow you are to have faith in everything the prophets have spoken! Wasn't this necessary, that the Messiah would suffer and enter his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them the parts about himself in all the Scriptures.

When they came to the village where they were going, he pretended he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us. it's nearly evening, and the day's almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was eating supper with them, he took the bread and said the blessing. Then he broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened; they recognized him. But he disappeared from them. They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire inside us when he was talking to us on the road, when he was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

And right then they got up and went back to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord was really raised! He appeared to Simon!" Then they themselves reported what happened on the road and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

### **Children's Story**

My mother always loved my dad, my brother, and me. We knew it. We could tell. She showed us that she loved us every day.

One way she showed her love was by cooking for us. Day after day she worked in the kitchen, combining all the important ingredients: meat and grains and vegetables, herbs and spices, and, of course, precious time.

When we sat down at the table for supper, we weren't just eating spaghetti, with meat sauce that had simmered all day. We weren't just eating shepherd's pie, with its blended flavors. More than that, we were tasting my mother's love for us. It was there in every bite.

It's funny, but food can do that. Food can carry messages of love.

In a little while, (most) all of you will come close to the Table for a little bit of food. It's not much to eat or drink, hardly anything really. But there's love in every bite, love in every drop. The love of Jesus.

Jesus prepared this meal for us. He was preparing it his whole life. Then he put the finishing touches on the meal, he poured the last of his love into the meal, as he suffered and died on the cross.

We share the meal, the bread and the wine, to remember Jesus and his love. And we do remember. We know Jesus loves us. We can tell. We can taste it.

## Sermon

This morning I want to approach last Sunday's theme from a different angle. Last week I talked about the garden: the original garden of Genesis 2 and the garden where Jesus was buried, the garden where Mary Magdalene saw him, saw him and mistook him for the gardener. I suggested last week that Mary was not wrong, that Mary's perception of Jesus was a proper one, because on Easter morning Jesus stood up as the first human being in God's new creation. We see this in the imagery of the garden and the gardener, which connect the new beginning with the old beginning and Jesus, the new Adam, with the old Adam.

And we are joined together with Jesus in this new creation, I said last Sunday. Joined together with him as his brothers and sisters. Joined together through faith and by the Holy Spirit. Joined together so that we are already, in some important ways, living new creation life. Today I want to say more about that, but from a different angle: not in a garden, but on a road and around a table.

**We don't know them well, the two people walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus.** It wasn't a long walk, but it was an understandable one. All the excitement had been in Jerusalem. A week earlier crowds had cheered and waved palms. Tense days of confrontation had followed, with Jesus always coming out on top. Then things began to fall apart. The Passover supper was somber. Chaos erupted that evening in the garden (another garden!). And after a sleepless night, morning found Jesus condemned and on his way to die. Now it was Sunday, the third day. And despite some disturbing, confusing news from the women, what hope was there? So they left for home in Emmaus. Where else do you go when your dream doesn't work out? You go home.

The two of them were on their way, on their way home. It was only about seven miles. A couple hours of brisk walking, and you're there. Though there was no spring in their step that day, no spring when the conversation was so discouraging.

Over and over again, they replayed the events. "How could it all have gone so wrong? And so quickly?" They had been sure about Jesus. He had reignited every smoldering hope within them. Because of Jesus, they had dared to imagine a bright future. But now instead of fire, there were ashes, all over again. "What happened? How did we get here?" Time after time, they rehearsed the same events. Time after time, they asked the same questions. Time after time, no answer came.

Then a stranger came along and joined them. He noticed the heaviness of their steps and of their expressions. And he invited them to tell their story one more time. Which they did, concluding that to them the story made no sense. Which was why they were going home. That's what you do when the story makes no sense. You go home. But the stranger had another story to tell, a story from the Scriptures, a story that made sense out of their confusion. In theory at least; they were still dimwits.

When they reached Emmaus, the two of them urged the stranger to spend the night at their place. (They were probably a husband and wife, the two of them. His name was Cleopas. Hers we don't know.) Their hospitality began with the evening meal, during which the stranger, their guest, starting acting the part of the host. He took the bread. He said the blessing. He broke the bread. He gave it to them. These were ordinary, typical actions, actions performed at every evening meal. But this time there was something extraordinary about those actions, something extraordinary, yet very familiar.

Then, all at once, they could see. And they recognized the stranger. It was Jesus! The one they had lost. He had found them and ignited the fire all over again! They didn't know what to make of it. None of them did yet. Not Mary. Not Simon Peter. But everything was different, and nothing would ever be the same again!

**It was new creation, and new creation changes everything.** Yes, it was new creation, new creation from a different angle. Last Sunday it was Jesus, the first person in the new creation. Jesus, the new Adam. Today it's Jesus, our Immanuel, God dwelling with his people.

In Genesis 3, God came to walk with the man and the woman in the garden. He came late in the day, as the day was moving toward evening. The sun was sinking. Cool breezes began to blow. It was time to visit, time for a relaxed conversation. Of course, the picture in Genesis 3 is one of disruption and disappointment. Because of sin, God's intention is not realized.

But Easter is a new day. It's a new world, a new creation. On this day, God in the flesh, God in the person of Jesus — on this day, as it moves on toward evening — on this day, God walks and talks with a man

and a woman. And, in the way the new creation with its life and beauty supplants the decay and ruin of the old creation, God gives the man and the woman a new story, a story of hope-filled, redeeming necessity, a new story to supplant the story of despair that was rooting in their hearts.

Then, as God has been doing from the beginning, as this world is having its beginning, God gives bread to the man and the woman. He feeds them, nourishing his gift of life in them, life that now at last can see and hope and trust.

**The world is filled to overflowing with bad news.** It's there on NPR and on CNN and on Fox. The occasional, light-hearted story can't push back the gloom. The clouds keep rolling in. It's enough to make a person turn the dial on the radio, remove all news channels from the TV's menu of favorites, and cancel the newspaper. A steady diet of bad news dims the light of the soul, churns the gut, weighs down already struggling steps, struggling because we have our own bad news, too: report cards, test results, transmission troubles.

**But Easter is good news.** Good news beyond all the bad news. Good news in the midst of the bad news. Easter is good news on the largest scale. God is recreating the world. Does it get larger than that? God has defeated death, defeated the devil, defeated sin. That's good news on the largest scale.

Of course, that large scale good news can be pretty abstract. Yes, God is recreating the world. But that seems so far away from where we live every day. Yes, God has defeated death. But until the final victory, cemeteries remain part of our lives. We could use some good news on the local level, close to home. Easter provides just that.

The original design called for God to be very close to people. God's visit to the man and the woman in the garden in Genesis 3 reflects that design. The ultimate destiny for God and humanity is much the same. Revelation 21 and 22 project a vision of God and humanity together again, together at last. On the way to Emmaus and there in the home, the design and the vision meld together. Through the Scriptures, the fire is reignited. Through the breaking of the bread, the veil is lifted. God meets the man and the woman here, now, in the midst of the old creation, in the midst of this world with its overflow of bad news.

The best news, for us and for everyone, in this bad news world is this. That we are not alone, not abandoned, but rather God is with us. Somehow, through some means, God is with us. If we follow the lines of today's Gospel story, we can see how that happens.

It has something to do with Scripture. The Scripture we read and heard together this morning, for example. The Scripture we're wondering about together now. And it has something to do with a meal. With the bread and wine that lie on the table before us. The bread that soon will be broken and shared among us.

Sometimes we're still dimwits. The story, the news has a hard time penetrating the fog. But sometimes it gets through to us. God gets through to us. I've seen it. I've seen faces brightened by the Scriptures, Scriptures recalled and explained. I've seen the looks of understanding, of joy, of relief. And I've seen the tears streaming as the bread is shared, when in the midst of deep sorrow or haunting fear, Christ is made known to us. "God with us," with us right where it hurts.

Easter means new life has been born into this world. Life that comes to us even today through Scripture, through bread, by the Spirit. New life has been born into this world, new life that changes us bit by bit on its way to changing everything for good.