

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Easter 3
April 26, 2020

Catching a Glimpse Luke 24:13-35

For people like you and me, people who have always come to church on ordinary Sundays throughout our lives, this Sunday has always felt a little like the day after Disneyworld. We remember what EASTER SUNDAY was like in times past: Beautiful music, trumpets; women wearing hats, children wearing ties, brightly colored spring flowers, Easter eggs a plenty, and pancakes in All Saints Hall. I remember greeting people after church and hearing people say, “I want you to meet our pastor, Mom and Dad, this is Pastor Dave, the pastor of this church that I frequently attend.” I hear this from young people I have never seen before. One man shakes my hand each Easter and smiles as he says, “Every time I come, you preach on the resurrection.” DUH!!!

All the high hopes and joyful music can make you forget that at Easter all we are really hoping for is a moment when we believe, when we feel, when we know deep down that it is true. If all goes well, we catch a glimpse, just a glimpse.

On this Sunday we always needed less bread or wafers for communion. The choir always had room to stretch their legs, there will be no pancakes after the service. It was always easy to find a parking place and you were once again able to sit in your own pew.

We are now sitting in front of our computers looking at the bulletin, and reading this sermon, hoping for a moment, a hint of hope, a glimpse of grace, a sign of life, but we have to pay attention.

The first Easter began without anyone imagining they would catch a glimpse. On that first Sunday afternoon, which was like Monday for the Jews, two dejected disciples are walking the dusty road to Emmaus. They want life to go back to what it was before, but they know it will never be the same (Doesn't that sound familiar). They would like to believe that Jesus' life and death are going to make some difference, but their chins are resting on their chests, their eyes are blank, and their faces are empty.

They do not even hear his footsteps. The Gospel of Luke is full of stories about not hearing and not seeing. Jesus joins them incognito and asks what they have been talking about. They can hardly believe it: "Where have you been? How can you not know what's been going on?"

They explain to the uninformed stranger that a prophet has been executed. They tell him about the hope they had for Jesus, how they had followed and how their hope had been crushed when Jesus was arrested and crucified. They had never known such a wonderful person. Jesus was gracious in everything that he did. He spoke as no one had ever spoken. He loved as no one had ever loved. Some women are spreading rumors about an empty tomb and angels, but they know hopelessness when they feel it.

Then it is Jesus' turn to marvel at how they can be so completely uninformed. You wonder at how long it takes to explain the scriptures, but the stranger lays it all out for them, and they do not get it. Jesus himself leads the Bible study, and nothing happens. This story is a source of comfort for anyone who has ever led a Bible study for people whose eyes are glazed over.

When these three (Jesus and this married couple) arrive at the couple's home, the risen Christ seems to have things to do and places to go, but they ask him to stay for supper. Stereotypically husbands are more likely to invite a stranger for dinner, but on this occasion they both agree. They cannot let him go, whoever he is. They ask him to say grace and the stranger is suddenly in charge. The house may not belong to Jesus, but the supper does. Jesus breaks bread, blesses it, gives it to them, and they open their eyes. They see that Jesus is with them and then Jesus is gone. Just a glimpse and he vanishes.

Then, and this part is remarkable, they walk seven miles back to Jerusalem. By this time, it must have been dark. Except, in a way, it was during the day, as they walked TO Emmaus, that they walked in the dark. Now, at night, they are walking, back to Jerusalem, in **thee LIGHT**. This moment at the table has changed them, turned them around. And they have to tell the other disciples!!

It is easy not to notice, but there is a worship service going on here. The preacher interprets the Bible, He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them.

Scholars suggest that Luke has given us the order of worship for the early church. The scriptures are read and discussed, and then they share the Lord's supper.

Justin Martyr wrote the oldest surviving account of a Christian worship service:

“And on the day called Sunday an assembly is held...and the records of the apostles (We'd call them the Gospels and epistles) or the writings of the prophets (the Old Testament) are read for as long as time allows (for most of us, it's when our stomachs start craving donuts). Then when the reading has finished, the one presiding in a discourse admonishes and encourages us to imitate these good things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers... then bread and wine are brought forward and the one presiding offers thanksgivings...and the wealthy who so desire give what they wish as each chooses. What is collected helps orphans and widows, and those who through sickness or any other cause are in need, and those in prison, and strangers sojourning among us; in a word, the offering takes care of all those who are in need.”

They did not pass a friendship register and our organ might frighten them, but the order of worship two thousand years ago is a lot like ours. We worship as they worshipped in the belief that we will meet God here. When the scriptures are preached and the bread is broken, Luke says that Jesus is present.

We come each Sunday to this meal, but it is easy to miss Christ in worship.

In part that is because we forget that Christ comes not because we make it so,

but because this is CHRIST'S Church. Sometimes we act as if we make worship happen. If the preacher says something profound (for a change), if the choir enunciates perfectly, if the children in the row in front of us sit still, if the communion assistants are sufficiently somber when they serve communion, then we will have worshipped right. We are here to give our best to God, but we do so, understanding that we will not coerce Christ into our presence. Christ comes as a GIFT.

Jesus comes suddenly out of nowhere. We do not even hear his footsteps. We will miss the sacred moments if we do not look with more than our eyes and listen with more than our ears. If we seek God with our HEARTS AND OUR SOULS, we may catch a glimpse. God comes in a phrase in a hymn, a word from scripture, a hope during a prayer, a moment when we feel God with us, a moment when we are truly alive.

We should not expect much more than a moment. God is with us for the whole journey, but we feel it only in partial, obscure, muffled experiences of the sacred. What we hope for is a fleeting glimpse that takes our breath away, makes our hearts burn within us. For if we catch a glimpse, it can turn us around.

If we look with all of our being and imagination what we may see is God, what we may hear is the faint sound of a voice somewhere deep within us saying that there is a purpose in this life, in OUR lives, whether we understand it completely or not.

Christ comes to explain our lives and our world in the light of the sacred stories of scripture. Christ joins us at our tables, and gives us his life so that we might share life together in his name. It is all a GIFT. WORSHIP IS A GIFT. CHRIST'S PRESENCE AMONG US IS A GIFT. If we pay attention and feel God with us, it is A GIFT!!!

SO, pay attention this morning!!! I will, if you will. And remember, that when we receive the sacrament in a few minutes, as Lutherans, we believe that: IN, WITH, AND UNDER the bread and wine, we receive the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord IS truly present with us in our eating and drinking.

Take Care! Stay Safe! Stay in Touch! Keep the Faith! Be EASTER PEOPLE TODAY AND EVERYDAY!!!!!!!!!!!!

Amen!!