

Sermon on Luke 24:13-35
Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of my favorite local Minnesota television shows used to be *On the Road Again* hosted by Jason Davis on Sunday nights. Jason traveled around Minnesota, visiting interesting local spots that most of us never heard of. From small towns, resorts on secluded lakes, general stores or bed and breakfasts, you never knew where Jason Davis would show up to do a story, with fascinating people in unexpected places. Thousands of stories in 35 countries over a 45-year career, but his favorite stories were found with unknown families in their homes, discovering something new and enlightening in the ordinary gift of their daily lives. So when we heard the show's theme song, *On the Road Again, I just can't wait to get on the road again*, by Willie Nelson, we were alerted to the possibility that our host was going to share with us a new story of the gifts we can discover anywhere around us or "down the road a piece" if we just take a little walk and open our eyes.

Just like Jesus did with his disciples throughout his ministry when he went "on the road", interacted with the people he met, listened to their stories, healed their diseases and taught them about the presence of God in their midst as he ate with them in their homes. Jesus was "on the road" from the beginning when he called his disciples by the sea, walked through the towns and villages of Galilee to preach the good news, then, after his transfiguration on the mountain, walking to Jerusalem to confront the authorities and be crucified.

So the gospel passage we read today starts out with two disciples walking down a road, going back home from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus, a seven mile journey. It was later that day on the first Easter. The two were talking about the terrible events that had happened the past Thursday night and on Friday, when all their hopes and dreams about Jesus had been cruelly dashed. His sudden arrest, trial, crucifixion and death had upset all their plans, and shook their faith. As they talked about these things, a stranger joined them and walked alongside them. It seemed that this stranger didn't know anything about current events, and was ignorant of even what had happened to Jesus. So they filled him in, about who Jesus was, and what the priests and the leaders had done to him. They had thought that he was the one whom God had sent to redeemer Israel, but now he was dead, crucified by the Romans. But they had heard a strange thing, that just this morning some of the women in their group had gone to the tomb, found it empty, and angels saying that Jesus was alive! So the stranger told them how slow they were to

believe the prophets, that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and then enter his glory. He then interpreted the scriptures to them about the Messiah.

Before we get to the conclusion of the story, the “good part”, I want to stop here. For it seems to show us one of the ongoing truths of the gospel: that Jesus shows up when we least expect it and not even looking, to bring us mercy and insight into the heart of God. When Moses was in exile from Egypt, in the wilderness, God appeared in a burning bush to call him out to deliver his people. When we are most dejected or down, when things we hope for have come crashing down, or the people closest to us have let us down, Jesus shows up, often in the voice of another human being, or an act of kindness or word of insight and hope. Our human experiences today are not so different from those of the disciples those days after Good Friday, when Jesus had been killed and all hopes his disciples had of seeing God’s kingdom come in Jesus the Messiah, had been dashed. What rings true and familiar to us was the feeling of hopeless, failure and disillusionment with God’s promises that the disciples must have felt that first Easter morning. The two disciples whose story appears today most certainly felt that dejection, grief and loss. Can you relate to their experience and emotions? I can.

These days so much has changed for human beings around the world because of the coronavirus pandemic. Whole nations have been shut down, people living isolated behind locked doors, in fear of being exposed to the virus. Life is not normal for any human being today, and daily life may never again be the same. In a way, we are all like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in that many feelings of hope and safety have been dashed, and many lives have been lost to the virus, creating anxiety and grief for many thousands upon thousands of people.

So, what changes have *you* experienced or seen this past month during the Stay at Home/COVID-19? How has this changed your daily life, and how do you feel about these things? It has also changed how we are functioning as the Church, the Body of Christ, when we cannot meet as we are used to meeting – in person! Please share your thoughts about these things on the chat bar....

For example, do you find it strange spending most of your time at home, without entertaining friends or family? Do you spend your time differently now? It is frustrating for many that we cannot go be in the presence of family or loved ones, cannot hold a baby or shake someone’s hand, binging on Netflix movies and maybe even getting bored. Not coming to church on Sunday mornings breaks our accustomed rhythm to the week. We are all off-center, and it gives us stress. Where do we find God these days, if we can’t come to church for worship?

In the gospel, the disciples didn’t recognize Jesus walking along with them because they were so dejected and heartbroken by all that had happens. We know what that’s like. When there is a death in your family, or of a close friend, it’s hard to see things as they are because of the cloud hanging over you. It’s hard to see

anything hopeful when your vision is blurred by grief. But the stranger walking with the disciples on the road did say things that sounded familiar, about the scriptures, and how all those things that happened recently to Jesus, did have meaning. So when the disciples invited the stranger into their home to eat with them, he blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to them. THEN they finally recognized Jesus! And he vanished from their sight. They looked at each other, and then they knew what had been familiar to them while Jesus had walked with them on the road – his words! So immediately they went back on the road and returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven disciples gathered together, and told them that they, too, had seen the risen Lord, in the breaking of the bread! In their home, in the midst of their dejection, when they absolutely did not expect him!

So the challenge for you and me today is to keep our eyes and ears open for God's presence among us in our world, different as it is today, when it is so hard to see hope and the light of God. *Where have you seen or experienced Christ's presence with you, or active in the world, during this corona virus pandemic?* Even when you least expect it – like in your home, or online, or in pictures you may see out there in the world? When the church cannot gather, how have you seen Christ present with us, as the Body of Christ? Please share your thoughts with each other on the chat bar, so we can all share these experience of Jesus' presence among us.

For I have seen Christ's presence in people's care for one another - voluntarily staying at home even when it is frustrating to do so. It is truly an act of love for others, that we keep our space and distance, and cooperate for the most part with the medical authorities and elected leaders who call upon us to shelter at home, not go to work, and close restaurants, bars, shopping centers, sports events and even worship services, so that the majority who are less affected by the virus can protect the vulnerable minority among us who are at higher risk. This cooperation has been happening all over the world, and it is a great sign of hope, if we can keep it up – even when a very vocal few are so opposed to this strategy.

We see God's love in the very real risks that doctors, nurses, and other health care workers make every day to treat people who suffer from this unknown, mysterious COVID-19, who sometimes are infected themselves, and some of them have died. We see Christ's presence in the many acts of love and compassion that people show by sewing masks, donating food and supplies, or reaching out to others who are isolated or in need. What acts of love have you seen?

I have also seen Jesus' presence in how we in the Church are finding ways to connect with each other in new and creative ways, using new technologies (like Zoom) that some of us had never even heard of just over a month ago! I didn't know what a "chat bar" was or how to find one, but now that other "bars" are closed, the chat bar is the most popular bar in town! I even use the chat bar as a

staple of my sermons, which are now “interactive” and a conversation with you online! Your conversations with each other are another dimension of the preaching of God’s Word, as you can share your thoughts with each other, and not only listen to me or your own thoughts! Technology opens up a new world of possibilities for proclaiming the good news of God! We also find that old, familiar technology (like the “telephone” – remember that?) holds renewed importance, so that we can communicate with friends, family and church members who don’t have computers or smart phones and cannot meet online. This has become another challenge for us when we cannot meet face to face. But doesn’t it seem like Christ is leading us, somehow, in unexpected ways to connect with each other, and be the Church, in these challenging times, to be a witness to God’s love in Christ Jesus?

So what are the lessons from the scriptures today? First, it is to acknowledge that we live in difficult times, with unexpected challenges to life and faith that we never have faced before. Second, that God appears in the midst of our anxiety and fears, in unexpected places and ways. Jesus is present with us, and walks with us on our difficult paths, to show us the way. So keep your eyes and ears open, sisters and brothers, for Jesus to show up in ways unexpected and unimagined. The challenge is to be ready to recognize his presence, often in a sister or brother, in a kindly deed or a prayer. Open your eyes in the breaking of the bread and Jesus’ blessing, for this is how Christ feeds your faith, gives you joy, and sends you out to feed others, in the name of Jesus. Thanks be to God! Amen.