

First Presbyterian Church  
 Greenfield, Indiana  
 Pastor John J. Paulson  
 May 8, 2011                      3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

**The Easter Message Continues!**

Acts 2:14, 36–41	Repent and be baptized!
Psalms 116:1–4, 12–19	God listens – Praise God!
1 Peter 1:17–23	Love one another!
Luke 24:13–35	The risen Lord appears!

*Informally before the sermon: Today we continue in the fifty day Easter season that runs from Easter Sunday to Pentecost, this year on June 12. The messages we may hear in our scriptures tell us to love one another, to repent and be baptized, to praise and thank God, and to look for the risen Lord as we go about our daily lives. You never know when you may encounter Jesus in the smile of a child, the beauty of a sunset, the clap of thunder that follows a bright lightning strike. You never know if you will see Jesus in the color of a tulip or the help of a stranger. It seems to me that Jesus, the Jesus that we have in our hearts, pops up often in the most unexpected places. That's what happened to two of his followers late in the afternoon on that first Easter Sunday.*

**Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer! Amen**

Walking along, feeling as down as they can be, two of Jesus' disappointed followers are leaving Jerusalem and heading out of town. They are disappointed because their teacher has died. Their hopes have been dashed like a bottle thrown against a stone fence. They have spent the last three years or so listening to Jesus teach and preach. Watching him heal and hearing him speak of the kingdom of God. It didn't work out the way they thought it would. They expected a king, they got a crucifixion! Just a week ago they triumphantly marched into Jerusalem now they were walking away from Jerusalem disappointed and discouraged. They arrived in Jerusalem to the cries of Hosanna, by Friday, the cries of Hosanna had turned into cries of "Crucify Him".

Now, it has been three days since their teacher died on the cross. Three days since they laid his body in the garden tomb. They are crushed. Now, they just want to get out of town and try to forget; of course they know they can never forget, but at least they hope to find a diversion for themselves.

Leaving Jerusalem, they are walking on a well-travelled road that leads to a town named Emmaus, about seven miles away. A town well known for spas, its hot springs and relaxing mineral baths. A great place for people to get away to forget their problems. While the visitors are there for the baths, the town also has to meet their needs for lodging and food and entertainment. I wouldn't doubt that the town resembled French Lick, Indiana or even Hot Springs, Arkansas in its heyday, with people flocking to the town to bathe in the hot springs, and getting involved in all sorts of other things at the same time. Good food, plentiful drink, and many other attractions.

Cleopas and his companion, who is possibly Luke, the writer of the gospel himself, are going to try to relax and recover from the events of the previous Friday when their Lord was hung on the cross and buried in a garden tomb.

It is Sunday afternoon. They have heard the rumor of the day that the women went to the garden at day break and found the tomb empty. They have heard the other rumors that some of the disciples went to the tomb and also found it empty. Just rumors, they think. No proof. It is time to get away. It is time to try to forget and figure out what to do with the rest of their lives.

Amidst all the confusion and rumors, they have decided to get away from Jerusalem for a day or two. Maybe they will just stay for an overnight at the spa, and then return to the city; maybe they'll stay until the city settles down; they are not sure. They just need to get away and have some time to think about what happened last week; why did they waste the three years they spent listening to Jesus? What can they do now? What should they do now? All pretty legitimate questions. But, their world is about to be changed again.

They are walking along the dusty road, talking between themselves, trying to make some sense out of what has happened, when a stranger comes up from behind, and begins walking along with them. They are enjoying their private, personal discussion, but since they don't want to be rude when this man joins them, they let him get in between them, and they keep on walking. They want to get to the spa; they want to get to relax, but they also want to be hospitable. Their teacher had told them about that; they had learned to welcome strangers; they had been taught that a stranger might just be the neighbor they were to love and care for. They had learned well. Their Jesus had been a good teacher!

"What are you two talking about," he asks. And they look at each other with questioning eyes. What should they tell him? Should they tell him that they were followers

of the man who was crucified last Friday? Should they admit that they knew him personally? Weren't the Romans and the Jews still out to get his followers? Wasn't there still danger in admitting that they knew him? They knew that Peter had denied three times that he knew Jesus to avoid possible trouble for himself.

But this man is so friendly. His voice is calming and full of assurance. Like putting on an old shoe, he seems to belong walking between them. In fact, he almost seems to be peace personified. They are not afraid, even though they continue to be cautious. Remember Judas in the garden? He gave the master a kiss, and we all know what happened next. Friendliness is not always a good thing.

Of course to them there is only one story that anyone and everyone in Jerusalem is talking about: the story of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. It was on all the news programs; the headlines in all the papers were about Jesus. They remember reading them.....

One declared: **“Jesus guilty! Sentenced to death! Death on the cross!”**

Another said: **“Jesus died at 5:07 p.m. on Friday night. Buried immediately!”**

Still another: **“Pharisees declare Jesus to be an imposter!”**

And one more: **“Jesus’ followers expect him back in three days!”**

It was all over the news, everybody in Jerusalem had to know what had happened.

Everybody in Jerusalem had an opinion about it.

Who was this guy they thought? Was this stranger from outer space? How could he not know what they must have been talking about.

Then, after thinking about it for a minute or two, Cleopas, realizes that the man is just passing through and has heard none of the news. He knows nothing about what has happened.

So, he asks the stranger if he knows what went on in Jerusalem the last week?

By this time we realize who the stranger is, even though they don't. We know that the stranger is Jesus, freshly resurrected, showing himself to many of his followers in many different ways. We wonder how they will react when we hear Jesus let them think that that he has no idea what is going on, and asks them what has happened that has them so upset and downcast.

Cleopas gives him a shorthand version, telling him: "We were talking about Jesus of Nazareth, 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. 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, but him they did not see." <sup>1</sup>

Then, the stranger, who we know really is Jesus, but they don't, gives them the rest of the story. He tells them how the prophets predicted that the messiah would be raised from the dead. As he explains the scriptures, he opens their minds to understand what the writers were getting at. Helps them to see what Isaiah really meant; what Moses really was talking about. They see God's plan in a new light ; they understand that God has always planned to offer salvation to the people. He explains the grace of God in a way they have never heard it explained before.

The are astonished at his knowledge. He must be some kind of a teacher; a scriptural authority; they are so fascinated with his explanations, his commentary on the scriptures that they invite him to dine with them at one of the many restaurants in Emmaus so they can hear some more.

After washing their hands and dipping their feet in the water trough outside the restaurant, they the three weary travelers sit down to relax. That seven mile walk on the dusty road had been tiring; they are hungry and thirsty.

The meal had been served and before anyone could take a bite, the stranger took a piece of bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them.

Suddenly they recognized the stranger. It was Jesus. Sitting right there at the table with them. It was Jesus. The rumors were true. The women were right! The tomb was empty. The angels told the truth. Jesus is alive!

Then, suddenly, he was gone. His chair was empty. They were alone with only the other diners and the waiters.

No time to finish eating. They jumped up and ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to the upper room to find the other disciples and tell them the good news. "Jesus is alive! We have seen him, they shouted. Our eyes were opened and we realized that we had

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24: 19 – 24 (NIV)

been walking and talking with Jesus while we were on the road to Emmaus. Forget the spa; forget the hot springs' bath; we have met the risen Christ! It doesn't get any better than that.

Of course the story doesn't end here. We know how the story ends. We know that Jesus did rise from the tomb on that first Easter morning. We know that our lives have been shaped by this knowledge:

We are here this morning because of it.

We have hope for the future because Jesus has a place for us in heaven.

Our lives have been changed forever because of Jesus' resurrection.

We can forgive others because God forgives us.

We can truly accept God's forgiveness because we accept God's forgiveness.

Our future is assured because of God's wonderful, amazing grace!

AMEN