

*Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter, 10.iv.2005, [9:00 a.m.]/10:30 a.m.
[Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint Luke / New Bridgeville, Pennsylvania]
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Acts 2:14a,36-41; Psalm 116:1-3,10-17; I Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35
Holy Communion, LBW - Setting 2*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from God Our Father and from Our Risen
Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠ Amen.

When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and He vanished from their sight."

-- Luke 24:30,31

Without visiting Jerusalem and walking from there to Emmaus it is hard to know how long the prolog to today's Gospel took in real time, the Disciples' conversation with *Jesus incognito*. I also have no idea how long it took for food to be brought to the three men at the inn or private home in which they sat down to supper. But it does seem to me that the real miracle of today's Gospel took less than a minute. I will try to keep my exposition of it as close to that time frame as possible.

There is *no* agreement on who the two Disciples mentioned here by Luke were. It is not certain whether the *Cleopas* of Luke is the same as the *Clopas* of John, the husband of one of the women at the

empty tomb. We do not know whether they belonged to the inner circle of the Twelve, now Eleven, Apostles, or whether they had been with the Apostles and the other Disciples holed up in that upper room in Jerusalem. If they had been in Jerusalem, they were leaving it now, off to the suburb of Emmaus. That much we do know.

We know something else, too. They did not expect to see Jesus. Whatever they had believed, or had wanted to believe about Him, they thought that Good Friday had settled the matter of His life and the question of His Messiahship. They were not ready to accept the word of the women who fled from the empty tomb in awe and in joy. Like Thomas, *they* had not seen Him, nor did they expect to.

So, for that very reason, they did *not* see Him, not even when He was walking beside them, not even when He explained the Scripture to them. They did not see Him until He sat down to eat with them, at their invitation, and until He blessed and broke the bread and made their supper His Supper, just as He had done with the Passover meal. And then, Luke tells us, He vanished from their sight. But the Disciples still had the bread of His real and personal presence, still had His words ringing in their ears and burning in

their hearts. That, with the Scripture, was all they had, and that was all they needed.

That is all *we* have, and that is all *we* need. That is all the Church needs until the end of our days and until the end of time itself. How powerfully this Christ of Scripture and Sacrament has been made present through the ministry of that Servant of then Servants of God whom the Church commended to God's mighty keeping in these last dramatic days.

As you have also been doing, I am sure, I have been a grateful viewer of film images of the Pope looking back over his incredible ministry, for which thanks and praise be to God on High! Two images so move me that I feel physically uplifted every time I see them. One is the face of Karol Wojtyła at an open-air Mass as he returns to his native Poland as Pope John Paul II for the first time. What joy and what complete courage! I can understand why young people—including so many of the students I taught at the Jesuit College of New Jersey—were instinctively attracted to this man, though they might disagree with him on any number of issues. It was his fearlessness, his complete lack of insecurity. He was just *cool*,

whether in the presence of a totalitarian regime that already knew its days were numbered or in the presence of youth break-dancing in a Papal audience. And why was he like that? Because John Paul knew that it was *Christ*, the risen and living Christ he made present to millions upon millions around the world through the Proclamation of Scripture and the Breaking of Bread, *Christ* and not himself, not even his *Papal* self, he was called to bring to the table of the world.

The other image that I want to keep in my mind's eye and in my heart is that of Pope John Paul in the prison cell with his assassin. Victim-survivors of violent crime think and think of what they might say to their perpetrators, but most of us, I am sure, are glad never to see the face that tried to kill us again. Not the Vicar of Christ, John Paul! He entered that cell and he spoke, eye-to-eye, with the man the Kremlin had hired to kill him. John Paul entered that cell and stayed there with purpose, with courage and without fear. Why? He brought *Christ* with him into that place and into that hour and with Christ he brought forgiveness and, I pray, peace for that used and tormented soul. These images will remain, even now that he has vanished from our sight.

What will we take home and into the world with us this day, as the Risen Christ makes Scripture God's Word to us and as He reveals Himself to us in the Breaking of Bread? If nothing else, then let it be this for which we pray: Grant us, Your Church, and me Your disciple, Lord Christ, to know that it is *You*, alive in me, present and active through me in all situations of this life, as I face dangers in this vale of tears that make me faint with fear, as I reach out toward the one who has harmed me or whom I have harmed, not knowing what to do or what to say. Grant me, together with your whole Church on earth, to seek You and to hold on to You alone, to Whom be glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever One God forever and ever.

✠Amen.

Now may Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God Our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. ✠Amen.

S. D. G. !