

Sermon – April 26, 2020
“Emmaus Road”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. 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. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told

what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This is the word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God.

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry. Amen

Before we break bread and enjoy a time of table fellowship today, I would like to tell you all a story. It is my story and I would like to share it with you, that it might become your story to tell as well. I was one of the ones who followed Jesus to Jerusalem. I saw the crowds that welcomed him by placing their coats on the road and pulling palms from the trees and placing them on the road as well, as Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey. I, along with so many others in the crowd that followed him and those who came from the city, cried out “Hosanna” as he rode. I was in Jerusalem in the upper room when Jesus ate a last fellowship meal with us and the disciples. I was in the city for the trial and his crucifixion. I was on the hill watching from a distance when they put him on the cross. I could not stay there as it was too horrible a sight to watch. His suffering was so great and we loved him so much and I was afraid they would come for his followers. I was in hiding with the others in the upper room after Jesus died, as we waited in fear for the Jewish authorities to come and take us away. I talked with the others as we tried to decide what to do next, now that Jesus was dead. On the first day of the week, Sunday, Cleopas and I decided that we would be better off to return to our homes and our lives in Emmaus. Many who had followed Jesus were leaving; no one had a plan for what to do next now that Jesus was dead. As we prepared to leave later that morning, some of the women who had gone to the tomb early before dawn to weep came back and told all gathered in the house that they had found an empty tomb and had seen an angel who told them Jesus is alive. Their news was astounding, but we did not believe them. Jesus was dead and had been dead now for three days. Some of the group went to the tomb and came back and then shared that the tomb was empty but they did not see Jesus. Cleopas and I decided that we should leave then if we were to make it to Emmaus before nightfall. And so we left the disciples and others in the upper

room and started walking the miles to Emmaus. There were lots of people on the road. All were leaving Jerusalem after Passover where they had celebrated the redemption of Israel from cruel slavery in Egypt. These happy worshipers were headed back to their homes, their jobs, their lives. We were also leaving behind the promise of a redeemer of Israel and heading back to what we knew we once were before we tried to follow Jesus.

As Cleopas and I walked, we talked about all of these things that had happened. We discussed what we thought of the mock trial the chief priests had held. We talked about how we thought Jesus might have been the long-awaited Messiah, the one to redeem Israel. We talked about how we thought Jesus might have been the one sent from God with great authority to come and rule in Israel. We talked about how we were ready to follow Jesus, but, instead, he suffered and died on the cross, his lifeless body placed in a tomb. Jesus was such a powerful prophet. He healed so many. He had done things that only one sent from God with authority could do. His trial was anything but fair. He had suffered so much on the cross, we could not stay and watch to the end. Now our hope that he was the Messiah had ended. It was over. It was time for us to go back to our lives, to leave this group of followers who had all hoped that Jesus was the anointed one of God and return to our former lives in Emmaus. We, with all of Israel, would continue to watch for the Messiah, God's anointed one. We walked and talked with heavy hearts as we left Jerusalem behind and walked along the dusty road to Emmaus.

Somewhere along the walk a stranger came near. The coming of a stranger after Passover was not unusual as the crowds that had swelled the population of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover were now streaming out of the city along all of the roads. Many of these travelers were not familiar with the roads and would often approach and ask for assurance that they were on the correct road to some distant place. Some who came near even wanted to share about what a blessing they had experienced as they celebrated Passover in the Holy City. This stranger was different. He asked us what we were talking about. I guess our voices had gotten loud as we discussed these things. His question stopped our walking and brought back the hurt and sadness that had gripped us since Jesus had died. We thought everyone in Jerusalem knew about the things that had happened to Jesus, how he was tried, unjustly convicted, beaten, suffered on the cross, died and was placed in a tomb. It had been the talk of the people all over the city.

We stood there for a moment in the middle of the dusty road in our sadness unable to speak, and then Cleopas was able to answer this stranger's question. Cleopas asked him if he did

not know about the things that had taken place in these days. The stranger asked, “What things?” We replied together, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth.” We told him Jesus was a mighty prophet in deed and word, who taught with authority and healed the sick. He quieted the Jewish leaders’ challenges, taught the crowds, and entered into the city through the East gate riding on a donkey as a humble king coming to Jerusalem, and drove out those buying and selling in the Temple. We told him we had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel, that he might have been the mighty one, sent from God with authority who would bring in the end of the age and redeem Israel. We had hoped that he might be the Messiah told of in scripture. We told him how the chief priests and leaders handed Jesus over to be put to death and crucified him. We told him that all of these things occurred three days ago and that early this morning some women who had also followed Jesus had gone to the tomb and come back and astounded us with the news that his body was gone and that an angel had told them Jesus is alive. Some of the group we were staying with went to the tomb and found it empty as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus. We had not believed the women. How could we? Jesus was dead. He suffered and died on the cross. We stood there in the road and told this stranger all the things we had been talking about as we walked to Emmaus that day. It made us sad to remember these things and sadder still to tell them to this stranger. I wondered where this stranger had been that he had missed all of these things.

This stranger listened carefully to our reply, then joined us as we all walked on to Emmaus. We were unburdened a bit by our sharing and walked a little quicker. We felt a little better and were ready to continue our journey to Emmaus, back to what we knew. We did not really expect a response from this stranger. Maybe he had not heard this news. We expected him to catch some of our sorrow and disappointment and be sympathetic and show us kindness and then leave us alone and continue on his journey. But this stranger began to speak to us and told us that we were foolish and that our aching hearts were slow to believe all that the prophets declared in the scriptures. Here was this stranger, who did not know about these things, telling us that we were foolish and slow to believe what Moses and the prophets told us, when we had been hoping that Jesus would be the redeemer of Israel. This stranger made a very odd statement after telling us about our misunderstanding of the prophets. He said that it was necessary that the Messiah should suffer and then enter into glory. I remember thinking, “Did he not know what a Messiah was? What was he saying? Who was this stranger?”

As we walked on down the road to Emmaus, our stranger began to quote scripture to us, starting with Moses' writings and continuing through all of the prophets. This stranger would tell us a scripture and then interrupt for us how the scripture showed that the Messiah must suffer and die before he entered into glory. He kept doing this again and again, scripture after scripture, prophet after prophet. The more he talked, the more we began to understand that in scripture there was a different idea of what the Messiah was and what would happen to the one sent of God. This stranger made it clear from the scriptures how the Messiah was to suffer and die and then enter into God's presence, into glory. He showed us how all of the prophets' words pointed to this same concept of the Messiah. He explained to us that the Messiah would not be a great military leader, but one who would suffer and die for the sins of all people. The Messiah would not redeem Israel from Roman rule, but would defeat sin and its consequence, death. And having defeated sin he would then enter into the glory of God. I remember thinking that I had not heard such teaching since I had listened to Jesus teach. That memory of Jesus' wonderful teaching reminded me that he was dead and made me sad all over again. This stranger walking with us along the road to Emmaus certainly knew the scriptures, and he explained how this idea of a suffering Messiah was what Moses and the prophets had told us. He explained how the scriptures pointed to a suffering Messiah who would enter into glory and be the redeemer, a very different redeemer from the Messiah we expected. Our remaining walk to Emmaus flew by, and in no time we were at the turn to go into the village, our village, Emmaus. We were at the point to leave the road from Jerusalem and return to where we had been before we left everything to follow Jesus. We slowed to turn in to the road that led into Emmaus. This stranger continued on as if he were going somewhere else. It was now late in the day. We knew the road ahead well. We knew that this stranger would not reach another village before night and that there were many dangers waiting for a lone traveler on this road. We encouraged him to come with us and to accept our hospitality, to come to our home, enjoy a time of fellowship at table, stay with us for the night, and continue his journey in the morning. This stranger agreed and we all turned in and went into Emmaus and to our home. We sat down at the table for a time of refreshment and fellowship at table with this stranger. There was bread in the house and it was brought to the table. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to us. Fellowship, just as we had once had with Jesus. We took the bread, looked up, and our eyes opened. It was Jesus! This stranger whom we had walked with, listened to, and who had taught us about God's Messiah from scriptures, now broke the

bread, and with our opened eyes, we saw that this stranger was no stranger at all, but Jesus! How could our eyes have been closed to who this was on our long walk with him? This was Jesus and in that moment of recognition, he was gone. In the breaking of the bread, during a time of table fellowship, Jesus was revealed to us. The Messiah is risen from the dead! Sin and death are conquered! The Kingdom of God is breaking in! Jesus is alive!

We sat there at the table in Emmaus in shock and looked at each other. Jesus was alive! He had walked with us, talked with us, opened the scriptures for us. He had sat at table with us, blessed the bread, broken it, and in that fellowship, our eyes were opened and we saw Jesus. Such joy filled our hearts! We sat there for a while and talked, and as we talked, we began to realize that not only did we know that Jesus was alive, we knew why he had suffered and died. We knew from God's word that this was God's plan and that Jesus had submitted to the plan because he loved us, all of us. We knew that God's plan, written in His Word, was not to send a mighty warrior to lead Israel to victory and redemption, but to send a servant who would obey God's will and suffer and die and enter into glory, and through that suffering and dying, win the greatest victory, victory over sin and death, a victory far greater than any victory we had ever thought. In that glory as a resurrected Messiah, The Messiah, Jesus, would bring others who believed in him into God's kingdom. We knew now that we had to interrupt our scriptures through the lens of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection instead of through the thoughts of man. We knew Jesus is alive, and we knew why he suffered and died. We knew he is The Messiah who is now alive, resurrected, and who, through his suffering and death, had reconciled us to God. We knew.

It took a few minutes, but we realized that we needed to go and tell the others still in Jerusalem that the news the women had received from the angel is correct: Jesus is alive, he has risen from the dead. We needed to share with the disciples what we now knew about how the scriptures teach that Jesus is The Messiah, and that he had to suffer and die and then enter into glory so that the kingdom of God may break into the world. We needed to tell all of Jesus' followers that Jesus was entering into glory, that the kingdom of God was breaking in and his death was not the end. It was the beginning, the beginning for him and for all of us who believe in a risen Lord.

It was late in the evening now and the sun would soon set. It is a long walk to return to Jerusalem and there are many dangers traveling at night, but the joy of this Good News was

overwhelming. We had to go and tell the others what Jesus had shared with us. Within the hour, we got up and left Emmaus and returned to Jerusalem. How our feet flew as we went back over that dusty road, as we walked back to Jerusalem, to find the others and tell them the Good News and what we had learned from Jesus.

We found the eleven and their companions gathered in the room where we had left them earlier that day. They were not the sad group of disciples that we had left. They were excited, and all started trying to tell us at the same time that Jesus has risen indeed and he had appeared to Simon! When they all calmed down a bit, they asked us, “Why are you back from Emmaus? Why have you returned to Jerusalem?” We told them our story. We shared with them what we had learned on the road about what the scriptures tell about the Messiah. We told them how this stranger had walked with us to Emmaus and had opened the scriptures to us and interrupted to us what they truly teach about the Messiah. We told them all how the identity of this stranger was revealed to us as we sat at table with him, where he blessed the bread and broke it, and how in that moment our eyes were opened and the identity of the stranger was revealed to us. The stranger was no stranger, but Jesus, who suffered and died and is alive, The Messiah!

Father, forgive us when our sins and desires keep us from recognizing Jesus. Father forgive us of our sins. Lord, I know that I am a sinner and that I need a Savior, a Messiah to suffer for my sins and to pay my debt that I might be reconciled to God, that I might become part of the inbreaking kingdom of God. Jesus, I believe that you are alive and I surrender my life to you. Come, Lord Jesus, and pour out your Spirit that I might be guided into your kingdom. Jesus, come and meet me on my road to Emmaus that my eyes may be opened. Amen.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Go forth into Jesus’ mission.