

In the Name of Jesus

HIS DIVINE SERVICE

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

After weeks of preparation, reflection and remembrance; after 40 days of meditating on the Stations of the Cross, pondering the Passion of the Lamb of God, and burying the Alleluias; the time has come. No longer are the crosses veiled, the season of waiting is over, and regrettably for some, so are the Soup Suppers.

Now is a time of joy, a season of celebration, a day of delight for He is Risen – *He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!*

This service is unique in the long list of services in which God offers to you His gifts in this place. As the readings this evening lead us to the close of the Great Triduum (three days and three nights of one Lord's Service), tonight's lesson happens in real time. The account of the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus happens on this exact day of the Resurrection Season, at nearly this precise time – taking place at "*That very day, and it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.*"

And what a day it has been, as ironically it becomes clear, the two disciples themselves explain to Jesus, who is yet unknown to them. They know all about the women at the tomb, the angels and the declaration that He Is Alive. They are familiar with and perhaps they even witnessed those testimonies of Simon and the others that declared that the grave is empty. But their understanding of these events is lacking. It is incomplete.

Luke explains the events in far more detail than the other gospel writers. In fact, aside from Luke, only Mark even makes mention of the proceedings on the road that evening. And even then, the account is abridged to these words:

After these things He appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

In Luke's Gospel we're told the name of the town, the name of at least one of the disciples, and the exact wording of some of the discussion. This inclusion as part of the very Word of God is not intended to serve as a satisfaction of curiosity or a fun bedtime story for the children. It is, in fact, a source of theological and Christological truth; replete with Good News of prophecy, redemption and divine service.

We don't know the exact location of the village of Emmaus, but scripture tells us the distance and that's good enough for me ... and Luke ... and God. The two disciples, one of which is likely Jesus' own uncle, are returning to their home in Emmaus after having been in the company of the disciples in Jerusalem. Some speculate that Cleopas, or Clopas' traveling companion was his son, Simeon – who would later become the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

As for the record of the disciples' discussion, it is not surprising that the two are conversing about the events that took place in Jerusalem when they are joined by Jesus. We are not told why, but He is not recognized by them – as one translation put it, *“their eyes were held back so as not to recognize Him.”* (Think about how we are to recognize Jesus... . More on that topic later). When Jesus inquires what they are talking about, Cleopas responds by asking if He is the only one in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have taken place. We begin:

And he said to them, “what kind of things?”

They said to him, “the things about Jesus of Nazareth, who became man, a prophet powerful in work and word before god and all of the people. This one certainly was handed over to the high priests and the ruling ones of us into judgment of death, and they crucified him. But we hoped that he remains the one about to redeem Israel; moreover with all these things this is his third day and these things have not come to pass. But also, some women from us amazed us, having come early upon the tomb, and not they found the his body, they came to say a vision of angels they saw, who say he lives. Then went away some of the ones with us upon the tomb and they found it just as also the women they said, but not him they saw.

That's pretty good stuff, right? These disciples are followers of Jesus and have now had opportunity to share with this apparent sojourner the story of Jesus' person, passion and crucifixion. Even in their grief, they are accurate in their testimony or witness of their teacher. Or are they? Jesus sure doesn't think so:

Then he said to them, "o foolish and slow in heart to believe all which was spoken of by the prophets! Was it definitely not necessary for the Christ to have suffered these things and also to come in into his glory?"

Here we find a turning of the tables, a changing of roles, a great exchange – though not THE Great Exchange necessarily. But to some extent, yes, here we do see The Great Exchange. Hear what that means to those disciples and to us: Jesus takes charge. His suffering was spoken of by the prophets and recorded for them, for us. And it had just taken place; for them, for us! Jesus had taken our place!

Those disciples were slow to believe and foolish. It was altogether necessary for Christ to suffer, both as True God and True Man, and they had opportunity to know this, to hear this and to believe this. But they, like you and I often do, failed in seeing the Savior of Scripture and instead looked for a Savior of their liking. They had searched for the King to Redeem Israel – not a Suffering Servant.

Then beginning from Moses and from all the prophets he explained to them in all the writings the things concerning himself.

Here, now, we see the true unveiling of the Gospel, this is God's catechesis. (Believers are to "see" Jesus through the lens of the Word of God). Here St. Luke reveals not just the Good News for the two on the road, but to us and to His Church. The Suffering Servant is, in fact, the One to redeem Israel and to redeem you. Jesus' interpretative teaching causes the hearts of these men to burn within them at the fullness of the message and the profound meaning of the suffering and death of the Christ. This was made even more profound in light of the fact that they as yet don't recognize Him. Their unspeakable delight is in the message, not yet in the Messenger.

Then they neared unto the village of where they were going, and he acted as though he was going further. And they prevailed upon him continually saying, "remain (abide) with us, because fallen and declined is the day."

Then he went in to remain (abide) with them. And it came to be, in the reclining of him with them, having taken the loaf, he blessed; and having broken, he gave out to them, and the eyes of them were opened and they knew him. Then he became invisible from them.

Here we find the climax of the text, the completion and resolution to the story. The Guest has become the Host. The One Who was unknown is now recognized. What was hidden has been revealed. What was not known is now understood. Not only has Jesus opened to the disciples the mysteries of God's Word, now their eyes have been opened to see Him as their Savior, their Redeemer.

We can relate to these disciples. You and I often miss the mark when it comes to fully understanding the truth of God's plan for redemption. We too fail to look upon Jesus through the eyes of faith. In our old Adam, we remain in our sin and daily need God's presence, blessing and grace. You and I, like those two on the road, are whole only when He abides with us.

And He does abide with us; not in the same manifestation as He did with Cleopas and the other disciple, but in a very real presence none the less. We find our Savior here, now. His Spirit is living and active in this place. His Word is proclaimed here, now. His true Body and Blood are received here, now.

Hear again the text:

Then he went in to remain (abide) with them. And it came to be, in the reclining of him with them, having taken the loaf, he blessed; and having broken, he gave out to them, and the eyes of them were opened and they knew him.

Fellowship meals are an important part of Jesus' ministry. And here for the first time we are told of His breaking of the bread after His resurrection. He has taught the men, and now He feeds them. We've "seen" Jesus do this before—in the feeding of the 4000, the feeding of the 5000 and certainly on the night in which He was betrayed.

Jesus is laying the foundation not just for His ministry, but also for His service— His Divine Service; first the Service of the Word, then the Service of the Sacrament. This is the pattern for receiving His gifts of life and salvation. His service to us, poor miserable sinners, is demonstrated already on that first day—in His coming to us, in His Word of truth, in His table fellowship.

Now and forever He abides with us in His Service; in His Word and in His Sacrament of the Altar. In the hymn (LWB 878), we will pray:

*Help of the helpless, O abide with me
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me
Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me
O Thou who changes not, abide with me
I triumph still if Thou abide with me
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me*

Jesus has promised to remain with us. His departure from sight to those Emmaus disciples, and likewise His ascension into the clouds some 40 days later, doesn't mean that He is no longer with us. We continue to see Him in faith by the Holy Spirit and in the means which He established.

Indeed, the victory won by the Suffering Servant on the cross, who fulfilled all Scripture as foretold by Moses in Exodus, and in the psalms, such as the 100th, and by the prophets, is your victory. This Redeemer of Israel and All that has risen this day comes to you on your road. You do in fact “triumph still...in life and in death”; for every time you receive His Divine Service He abides with you.

For this, we offer our prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to work faith in us, in all, in the hearing of the death and resurrection of Jesus;

We praise the Father who grants us life everlasting for Jesus' sake;

And we offer our thanks for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is Risen. *He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!*

Easter Evening Festival Service
April 5, 2015
Psalm 100; Exodus 15:1-18; Acts 10:34-43; Luke 24:13-35
Deacon Tom Honebrink