

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“Stay With Us”**

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*“So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’ So, he went in to stay with them” (Luke 24:28-29).*

It was Easter evening. Jesus had died. There was no doubt about that. And with him had died the hope and fledgling faith of his disciples and followers. Of course, a few of the women were saying his tomb was empty and were even claiming to have seen him alive. But lots of people do that; shortly after the funeral in the pre-dawn hours they see a hazy vision of the one they miss the most. So, how trustworthy can their testimony be?

And that’s what the two men are talking about as they walk slowly and hopelessly from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had heard of Jesus, along with everyone else in Jerusalem, and they liked what they heard. They had concluded he was the one who would redeem Israel and free her from oppression. But now Jesus is dead and they’re grieving the loss of hope.

As they walk, a stranger catches up to them. We know it’s Jesus, but they don’t. The text says “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” Don’t let that trouble you. It’s no big deal. It is God who gives us eyes to see and brains for facial recognition. If he wants, he can flick that switch off. In fact he does that to me all the time, or so I would like to think!

In any event, the stranger asks them what they’re talking about. They hesitate. One of them is even a little terse. “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn’t know about the things that happened there?” “What things?” the stranger asks. They start off reluctantly, but a trickle turns into a gush. They tell him everything. “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” “We had hoped.” That’s past tense, plu-perfect, which means they’re no longer hoping.

That’s when the stranger lets them have it. “O foolish ones” he says, “so slow to believe! Didn’t the prophets of old say it had to happen this way?” He scolds them. They should have known this, for it was made plain in Scripture long before. The stranger sighs the sad sigh of a teacher going over material that should have been learned long ago. He starts *again* from the beginning. V. 27, “. . . beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

That’s an important point of this text. Neither God nor Christ can be known except by revelation. That is, the only way we come to know Jesus is through the Word of God. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is not coerced by revelations to the unprepared. Notice, after the resurrection Christ appears to disciples, not to unbelievers on the street, or in synagogues, or in the palace of Pontius Pilate. The risen Christ does not frighten people into the faith. He’s not interested in a faith that acquiesces before his power, because that’s not really faith, is it? That’s simply acknowledging what can no longer be denied. No, it’s only after instruction in the Word that the two disciples recognize Jesus.

In other words, Jesus evangelizes the same way you and I have to do it . . . the slow way, the hard way, by patient instruction in the Word. And it's just two ordinary guys he's working on here. Not the upper crust and swanky set; and not a massive crowd. Just two ordinary people like you and me . . . but they are important to him, because "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

You know, if it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for you and me. Yes, there are times we'd like to startle people into the faith, wow them into the faith, do the power job on them. There are times we'd love to see Jesus pop off a few miracles here and now, for all the skeptics and atheists of our age. But that would not evoke faith and trust, just a fearful acknowledgment. It makes me think of the parable of the rich man in hell, begging someone from the dead be sent to his five brothers, to warn them, frighten them into the faith. But the answer is "No." "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them." In other words, Moses and the prophets are sufficient. Repentance and faith are usually brought about through the Word of God, not via dramatic experiences. That portion of Israel which rejected Jesus as Messiah did so because of their failure to understand their own Bible.

So, it is today. The Book of Concord says, "The reason some are not saved is as follows: They do not listen to God's Word at all, but willfully despise it, plug their ears, and harden their hearts. In this way they block the ordinary way for the Holy Spirit so He cannot perform His work in them. Or, when they have heard God's Word, they make light of it again and ignore it. But their wickedness is responsible for this [that they perish], not God" (FC Ep XI 12).

"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself." And so, that's the way we do it around here too. It's slow. It's hard. It's labor intensive, sometimes tedious. There's no profit margin to speak of, only debt. It happens in the classrooms of our school. It happens in VBS and Sunday School. It happens around your dining room table and in conversations in the car with your children. And I know what it looks like: listeners yawning their way through, distracted by every little thing, walking out in the middle like clockwork to go to the bathroom or get a tissue. Some fall asleep. But the Word is where God chooses to do his work. He does not usually choose dramatic experiences to wow us into the faith. He doesn't come to these two in a blaze of blinding light. He comes as a man who listens to their story but also as a man who pulls them back into Scripture. ". . . beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." There's no hocus pocus here. . . just Scripture. Remember, that's what he did when the devil was tempting him in the wilderness. He responded to each temptation with Scripture, "It is written . . ." he kept saying. Sometimes Scripture embarrasses us, but if it was good enough for him, it's good enough for us.

As they draw near to Emmaus, with the sun beginning to set, Jesus acts as if he's going further. He's not going to impose himself on anyone. But the two insist, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

He accepts their invitation, and when at table with them somehow Jesus, though guest, becomes the host. "He took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them." He "Took . . . blessed . . . broke . . . gave . . ." He's doing all the verbs. Clearly, this is the language of the Lord's Supper, where we are the guests and he the host. And that language flicks the switch in the two men. Vs. 31, "Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." The two

have now experienced Christ in Word and Sacrament, in the interpreting of Scriptures for them, and in the breaking of bread.

No doubt, Luke is telling us this is how you will know the Lord: in Word and Sacrament. Don't chase after the dramatic experiences. And don't make a mountain out of molehill . . . you know what I mean? As if God is speaking to you directly through every little coincidence or dream or sign. We have Word and Sacrament. That's where the Living Christ promises to be. Those other signs and coincidences . . . maybe, but you can never be certain. With Word and Sacrament, you can be certain. You can enjoy the assurance of the Lord's presence, the Lord's will for you. He promises to be in these means and work through them.

You know, Jesus appeared to many others after his resurrection. Over a period of forty days until his ascension into heaven, he appeared to many individuals. Yet if that were the whole story . . . that only a select few got to experience the presence of the living Christ, that means the rest of us would experience only the *absence* of Jesus. Our fate would be to try to keep faith alive on the thin diet of these reports of his having been seen by others two thousand years ago. We would be secondhand Christians at best, but more likely we wouldn't be Christians at all, so far removed from those resurrection appearances. But God's Word here is pointing us to the living Christ who comes to us today through Word and Sacrament. His living presence in Word and Sacrament make us firsthand witnesses of his grace.

One last thing. "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent." Those words struck me this week, and I've been praying it all week, for myself, and for my family, and for you, God's family. "Stay with us" Lord. It's getting harder, isn't it? We were prepared for a 5k, but this is beginning to feel like a 26.2. Some of you are in the hospital, or in assisted living facilities or living alone. Not even your spouse or children can come in for a visit, nor your pastor to give you Holy Communion. In the words of the hymn we'll soon sing, "Stay with us" Lord. Walk with us and hear when our weary spirits cry (LSB 879 v.2).

Some were thinking retirement might be just around the corner. College graduates were thinking this spring would be a hot market for new hires. Others were assuming a promotion was due. But now all bets are off. Again, from the hymn: "Walk with us, Lord. Our spirits sigh: Feel again our loss." (Verse 2.)

And the fear that maybe this is and will be the new normal, that communicable diseases and supply chain problems and other threats will just be the way of life until the risen Christ returns. "Stay with us, Lord, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent." "Wipe our tears, forgive our fears. Jesus, lift the heavy cross" (Verse 3).

Meanwhile, we're lonely. There are no spontaneous invitations for dinner and cards and good aromas and laughter that fills the house. Weddings, funerals, graduation parties . . . ten or less or cancelled altogether. "Stay with us. Cheer the heart, Your grace impart: Jesus bring eternal life" (Verse 5).

Stay with us Lord. I'm here to tell you he will stay with us. He will never leave us. You are never alone. Specifically in Word and in Sacrament, we experience the abiding presence and the abiding grace of the Risen Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.