

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Who were these two we encounter in today's reading? Well, we can return to last weeks reading from Luke where we left off with the body of Jesus no longer in the tomb. As you may recall, when Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of Jesus shared what happened at the tomb with the Eleven and the others they were not believed, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. The two of them were the others, hanging out with the disciples, groupies of Jesus I guess.

As they were walking these two were talking about everything that had happened, Jesus joined them, but was not recognizable to them. He asked, **what are you discussing together as you walk along?** So they shared what has happened with downcast faces – downcast not only in grief because of the death of Christ, but I think perhaps downcast because they had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And the response by Jesus? **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”** And then he explained, teaching once again, what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. At the end of his time with them, just after taking bread, giving thanks, breaking it and beginning to give it to them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he disappeared. They returned to Jerusalem and shared what had happened and according to the gospel of Mark, the eleven did not believe.

Now this isn't the first appearance of Jesus following his resurrection but before his ascension. The first is recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John who all share the appearance of the resurrected Christ to Mary Magdalene as she wept at the tomb. Yet her story is not believed either according to the gospel of Mark. And a third time he appears, this time to the eleven, saying, **Peace be with you,** which startled and frightened them. Even when he shows them his hands and his feet, some still doubted. In gospel of Mark, he rebukes them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen after he had risen from the dead. But he resumes being the teacher, the rabbi, reminding them of what he had told them while he was with them. And before he leaves

them to ascend to the Father, he charges them, saying according to Mark, **Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.**

It would be easy, way too easy, to question the response of the eleven. After all, they had a front row seat to the teachings of Jesus, they witnessed healing after healing, miracle after miracle. They witnessed crowd after crowd drawn to the words of Jesus. They knew Jesus firsthand. They saw his love for others, his service to others, and despite knowing what was in store for him, they witnessed Jesus going to his death for them and for us. How could they doubt?

But then how can we doubt? This faith thing, it's a journey, and not an easy one some days. We are tested by worldly things and solutions that are not healthy for ourselves and for others. Some of us turn to alcohol and drugs, we overindulge in food, some of us throw ourselves into work as a form of escapism, some of us simply isolate from the world, we turn away from God rather than turn to God. Some of us seek more stuff, bigger houses, nicer cars, clothes, material things as a solution rather than turn to God and the teachings of Christ. Why is it that when faced with challenges, despair, grief, anger, we seemingly turn away from our faith. Why is it that we need convincing time and time again that in Christ Jesus lies our redemption, our salvation, our grace?

From the writings of Martin Luther, we have come to understand that we are both saint and sinner. We are God's creation within whom he gave free will. The power to choose. He also gave us the power to love one another, to serve one another, and called upon us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And to "Love your neighbor as yourself".

Yet we fall short. But there is hope, hope in the Risen Christ. And there are things we can do to keep us closer to God and from being less likely to turn to those worldly things that often bring harm into our lives. Its things like what we are doing today – coming together as a community of Christ, to be in relation with each other. To be with others who can lift us up when we are filled with doubt, to encourage us in our own faith journey. Things like reading the Bible, seeking wisdom, encouragement, and instruction from its teachings. Things like sharing

the Good News and encouraging others to seek a relationship with God. Things like engaging daily communion with God and seeking His guidance. Things like serving others and generously sharing our resources, reflecting the love and sacrifice of Christ.

It is said that confession is good for the soul – even for us Lutherans! I confess I am not consistent in many of these things I just offered up. But I keep working on it, I keep trying to be better than before, a better reflection of Christ – to be a living example of the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control of the Holy Spirit.

Man, it can be hard! But I know this, I am better because of you. To be among others who are on the same journey as I am. I can't imagine facing the uncertainty, the divisiveness, the hatred and anger in our world without you. I know that every time I walk through the door to join in worship with a community of Christ, I will leave better, that some healing will have occurred right there among you. It happens when we share in the love and grace of God, who gave up his only son so that we might be free of sin. So that we too, just like the apostles, can share the good news – Christ is Risen!