

Easter Sunday The Resurrection of the Lord

Luke 24:13-35

¹³ Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, ¹⁴ and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. ¹⁵ And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. ²¹ But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.

²² Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning ²³ and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see."

²⁵ And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. ²⁹ But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. ³² Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?"

³³ So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them ³⁴ who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

[Note: On Easter Sunday the noon and evening masses have gospels from Luke, otherwise the morning gospels are the Johannine resurrection narrative]

An Easter walk to Emmaus. Two of the disciples who had been with the Eleven on Sunday morning (v. 9) leave for Emmaus after having heard the report of the women and of Peter. This story, another unique offering of Luke, has pattern similarities with the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip later on: a journey, the interpretation of Scripture, a significant action, and a mysterious disappearance (Acts 8:26-40). In the Greek

text, the village of Emmaus is said to be “sixty stadia” from Jerusalem. A *stadion* was about six hundred feet, making the distance around seven miles.

Unable to see. Jesus is taken for another pilgrim returning home from the Jerusalem festival. The two disciples do not recognize him. Their eyes are “prevented” an expression for spiritual blindness. Various appearance stories say that Jesus looked “different” (Mark 16:12; John 20:14; 21:4). His body has definitely been transformed by the resurrection, but the point in these descriptions seems to be that it takes faith, a gift of new eyes, to recognize the risen Lord. Readers are helped by knowing that some of Jesus’ friends did eventually recognize him and testified to the reality of his resurrection, but even more by realizing that recognition of the Lord does not depend on his natural visibility.

The passive “prevented” (*ekratounto*) raises the question, “Who or what kept them from recognizing Jesus?” Schweizer (*The Gospel According to Luke*, 373) suggests: “What stands in the way of their faith is their belief in an image of Christ that does not describe Jesus.” Could our expectations of Jesus blind us to the real Jesus? Could it be a divine passive? Could it be God that kept them from seeing Jesus – if so, then God created the situation where Jesus could explain scriptures to them. Tannehill (*The Narrative Unity of Luke/Acts*, 282) combines the divine and human sources of “blindness” when he writes: “God holds human eyes in the sense that God’s ways necessarily appear meaningless to humans who understand events in terms of their own purposes and ways of achieving them. A new vision of how God works salvation in the world must be granted to the disciples before a crucified and risen Messiah can be meaningful for them.”

God may use our inadequate or narrow understandings to blind us so that God might give us a new vision of God’s ways in the world with its related understanding of scripture. Remember that Saul was a very devout and committed believer in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before he was blinded by the light of Jesus. Could his deeply held, devout Jewish beliefs have kept him from seeing the risen Jesus before? If so, what might that imply about us? Whatever deeply held beliefs that we have, we, perhaps, should take less seriously; and recognize that our faith comes as a gift that we can only humbly accept -- not proudly claim.

Things Explained. The disciples are distressed by the death of Jesus and cannot believe that the event that has shaken their world is not known by another pilgrim. Cleopas is named, but not the other; perhaps Cleopas later exercised an important role in the Christian community. They describe Jesus as a mighty prophet, the long-awaited prophet-like-Moses (Deut 18:15; Acts 7:22). They had hoped he would be not only a prophet but the messianic deliverer of Israel (see 1:68). Again there is emphasis on the role of the leaders in Jesus’ crucifixion (v. 20). The “third day” is probably remembered as part of a mysterious promise of Jesus (18:33). Even the accounts of the empty tomb did not lead them necessarily to conclude that he had risen, because the resurrection expected by the Jews was the general victory of all the just at the end. It was obvious to them that the end and the establishment of a new order had not come. They did not expect an individual resurrection in the midst of history.

Jesus upbraids them for their blindness. They have read the prophets all their lives but not recognized the fulfillment in the *necessary* suffering and death of Jesus (according to

God's plan). The cross preceded the glory. This will be the pattern for his disciples (Acts 14:22).

At The Table With Jesus. The disciples are struck by what Jesus has said and ask him to *stay* with them. The word “stay” or “abide” here may have richer overtones, as in John's Gospel (John 14:17; 15:4–10). Jesus shares a meal with them, which is described so as to recall the multiplication of the loaves (9:16) and the Last Supper (22:19). In this “breaking of the bread” (an early name for the Eucharist: Acts 2:42, 46) they recognize him; immediately he disappears from their physical sight.

One should note the similarities of narrative. Luke describes Jesus doing the same actions as before

	Emmaus 24:30	Last Supper 22:19	Feeding 9:16
taking	<i>labon</i>	<i>labon</i>	<i>labon de</i>
the bread	<i>ton arton</i>	<i>ton arton</i>	<i>tous pente artous</i>
blessing	<i>eulogesen</i>	<i>eucharisesas</i>	<i>eulogesen autous</i>
breaking	<i>klasas</i>	<i>eklasen</i>	<i>kataklasen</i>
giving	<i>epedidou</i>	<i>edoken</i>	<i>edidou</i>
to them	<i>autois</i>	<i>autois</i>	<i>tois mathetais</i>

Should we assume that these two disciples were at one or both of these events and that they recognized Jesus through these familiar actions? Should we assume that these two disciples were not at either event and that the “breaking of bread” is “eye-opening” all by itself, i.e., the power of the sacramental meal? If they were not at the earlier feeding events, can we assume that the readers of Luke would recognize the words and actions from their participation in the Eucharist?

Jesus Now Absent. They remember that their hearts were “burning” without their knowing why when he was explaining the Scriptures to them. Now they know that it was his risen presence they were experiencing. Luke's readers know that the same experience is available in the church in the Eucharist and in the reading of the Scriptures. The experience of the risen Lord cannot be held in. It must be shared, proclaimed (Acts 4:20). By the time they return to Jerusalem, the good news is already known. Jesus has appeared meanwhile to Simon Peter, the leader of the Twelve; this appearance is not described in the Gospels. Luke closes his narration of the story with a reminder for his readers of its special significance for them: recognition came in “the breaking of bread.”

Jesus appears to the community. If the reality of Jesus' spiritual presence in the church was emphasized in the preceding narrative, the physical reality of his resurrection body is emphasized here. From the earliest times in the church, there was a danger of docetism, the heretical belief that Jesus was God behind a thin veneer of humanity: thus his suffering was only playacting, and his resurrection was simply a return to a completely spiritual existence with no bodily effect. The Letters of John combated this error (1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7). The present narrative stresses that Jesus' resurrection body is real. The disciples touch him; the marks of the passion are visible in his hands and feet; he eats with the disciples.

Their panic is not surprising, even though they have already heard about the earlier appearance. They are still excited and tense with the unfamiliarity of it all, and Jesus suddenly appears in their midst. His question to them is rhetorical, a way of introducing the Scriptural instruction that will help them to assimilate the truth of this marvelous event. The Old Testament is referred to in a traditional way by naming its three collections: law, prophets, and psalms (usually “writings”). His words commissioning them as witnesses of his resurrection foreshadow the Acts of the Apostles. The “promise” of the Father is the Holy Spirit who will be given to empower them to fulfill their mission (Acts 1:8).

Notes:

24:13 *that very day*: this story firmly in with the other happenings on the day of resurrection

***seven miles*:** literally, “sixty stades.” A stade was 607 feet. Some later manuscripts read “160 stades” or more than eighteen miles. The exact location of Emmaus is disputed.

24:14 *about all the things that had occurred*: Luke does not define the subject of their conversation, but all these things must refer to the stories of the empty tomb and of the angels.

24:16 *their eyes were prevented from recognizing him*: A consistent feature of the resurrection stories is that the risen Jesus was different and initially unrecognizable (Luke 24:37; Mark 16:12; John 20:14; 21:4).

24:18 *Are you the only visitor*: Cleopas’ questions presents quite an ironic situation. The two disciples nearly rebuke Jesus for not knowing (*ginosko*) what’s been going on in these days. Yet, we know that they are the ones who really don’t know (*epiginosko* v. 16 = “recognize”) what’s going on. Their “lack of seeing” involves more than comprehending the resurrected Jesus among them, but also their understanding of the things that have been going on (vv. 19b-24) and their relationship to scriptures (vv. 25-27)

24:19 *What sort of things*: To Jesus’ question What things? they gave an illuminating answer. They saw Jesus as a prophet. Jesus referred to himself as a prophet, but in terms of his rejection at Nazareth (4:24); and his death in Jerusalem (13:33). Jesus stresses the persecution of the prophets, which his followers will also face (6:23). Being a “prophet” for Jesus in Luke means rejection, persecution, and death, which is what happened to Jesus.

For the people, they refer to Jesus as a great prophet after raising the widow’s son (7:16) -- a great act of miraculous power. It is likely they expected some great miracle from this prophet for the “redemption of Israel” (v. 21). As Tannehill (*Luke*, 353) writes: “They do not make a connection between Jesus’ role as prophet and his violent death.” I would also add that they don’t make a connection between Jesus’ role as redeemer and his violent death.

24:21 *we were hoping*: the main problem expressed by the two disciples is the loss of hope. The imperfect of hope (*elpizomen*) implies that they “were hoping” or “kept hoping” in the past. The crucifixion of Jesus was a loss of hope. The resurrection of Jesus restores hope. He is no longer dead. However, note that just the appearance of the risen Jesus was not enough to restore faith and hope -- they don’t even know who he is. Secondly, Jesus’ interpretation of scriptures points to a new understand of redemption -- one that involves a suffering Messiah (v. 26). NOTE the irony that suffering is necessary for the Messiah “to

enter into his glory". God's ways are often found in their opposites. Tannehill (*The Narrative Unity of Luke/Acts*, 283-4) says: "God's action is perceived especially in those situations and experiences where God's saving purpose surprises, because it is quite contrary to human plans and expectations. These experiences emphasize the continuing tension between divine action and human expectation. These experiences are sufficiently important in the plot to describe the God of Luke-Acts as the God who works by irony. The disciples on the road to Emmaus are about to discover that they are the happy "victims" of the God of irony."

24:22-24. The travelers single out what they have learnt from the women about the empty tomb and the vision of angels. They do not say who went to the tomb to check, but the plural, some of those who were with us, shows that Peter had not been alone. The women's story had been verified, at least as far as the empty tomb went. But these two conclude sadly, him (there is emphasis on this word) they did not see. Apparently those who went to the tomb had hoped to see Jesus; but they did not, and this threw doubt on what the women had said.

24:25 *Oh, how foolish you are!* : Perhaps "foolish" is a trifle strong for *anoētoi*, and 'How dull you are!' may give the sense better. In either case, the words fall short of being a compliment

24:26 *That the Messiah should suffer . . .* : Luke is the only New Testament writer to speak explicitly of a suffering Messiah (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 17:3; 26:23). The idea of a suffering Messiah is not found in the Old Testament or in other Jewish literature prior to the New Testament period, although the idea is hinted at in Mark 8:31-33. See the notes on Matthew 26:63 and 26:67-68.

24:27 *Moses and all the prophets:* formed the starting-point, but Jesus also went on to the things that referred to himself in all the scriptures. The picture we get is of the Old Testament as pointing to Jesus in all its parts. Luke gives no indication of which passages the Lord chose, but he makes it clear that the whole Old Testament was involved. We should perhaps understand this not as the selection of a number of proof-texts, but rather as showing that throughout the Old Testament a consistent divine purpose is worked out, a purpose that in the end meant and must mean the cross. The terribleness of sin is found throughout the Old Testament and so is the deep, deep love of God. In the end this combination made Calvary inevitable. The two had wrong ideas of what the Old Testament taught and thus they had wrong ideas about the cross.

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Easter Sunday 2010

Acts 10:34, 37-43
Col 3:1-4
John 20:1-9

Act 1: Palm Sunday into Holy Thursday - the adoring crowds welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem with *Hosanna*; an intimate meal shared with the disciples. They are all scenes of **LOVE PORTRAYED**.

Act 2: Holy Thursday into Good Friday. 30 pieces of silver exchanged, a night of trials, an innocent man, yet handed over. Our messiah scourged and sentenced to death. **LOVE PORTRAYED GIVING WAY TO LOVE BETRAYED**.

Act 3 opens at the stark place of execution – Calvary. Jesus the Galilean on the Roman cross of death. Then, Jesus dies, diving up his Spirit into the World. How are we to call this act? If we have moved from love portrayed to love betrayed, then what is this? Is it loss? Was all this for naught? Or is it affirmation that “**God so loved the world, He gave his only Son.**”?

Act 3 open on Calvary in ambiguity. Some disciples overcome with their despair, fleeing from the sight of Jesus on the cross. Those who would raise their eyes to the Cross are able to **LOVE DISPLAYED**

Through the long night we have waited until the closing of Act 3: Easter morn. An empty tomb, an angel’s message, hope encountered in the words fulfilled – in three days... in three days. We’ve the advantage of two millennia of reflection. We’ve the advantage of the faith of countless generations handed on to us. We are able to look upon the cross, Jesus’ arms wide open and see the waiting embrace of love displayed for all time to see. We believe, because we see through the lens of Resurrection.

The three Acts of love: **LOVE PORTRAYED, LOVE BETRAYED and LOVE DISPLAYED** are the great witness to an epic encounter of Love with its opposite – not “hate,” but death. Our Easter experience calls us to see this encounter and know that Jesus has passed through the maw of death and has risen...He has risen.

Love is shown to be stronger than Death. The love we have already experienced in the love between wives and husbands, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and family. Our experience that says this thing, this love, is something beyond us, more than us, something



eternal. Something that can not simply cease at the edge of the grave. And our intuition is correct. Love suffers all things, endures all things... even death. And rises to eternal life.

The great hidden fear of our lives and loves – Death. The 17th century metaphysical poet John Donne understood part of the mystery of the Resurrection when we left us *Holy Sonnet 10*:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;

.....

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

The Resurrection is the beginning of new life and the beginning of the end of Death.

The betrayal of Act 2 gives way to the light of the Easter. The play has always been about Love Displayed. Displayed in the creation of the world, displayed in the Incarnation, displayed in the life and words of Christ, displayed on the Cross, and displayed in victory over death.

We are Easter people, called to the world – to be the Love of Christ on display for all to see. And more. In the words of St. Augustine – “*see what you are, become what you see.*” See the life of Christ, live as Christ, *become what you see.*