Easter 3A 2020 Stay with us Lord

Luke 24: 13 - 35

13 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” 19 And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 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 happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” 25 And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 29 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. 30 When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” 33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This wonderful Easter reading of the Risen Jesus walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus could not have come at a better time. They ask the Lord to stay with them because it was getting late in the evening and they wanted to hear more of his exciting bible study. We are living in lonely days of self-isolation during a global pandemic being bombarded by rising casualties with the stress that it all brings. On top of that, Canada has suffered its worst shooting rampage in our history in Nova Scotia (not counting the Northwest Rebellion and Louis Riel) and then there are reports of a famine of “biblical proportions” rising in Africa.

Stay with us Lord.

The stress is driving out hope and light and love. We need you Lord. We cannot go on without you Lord. Please stay with us!

The evening on that way to Emmaus could well be the twilight of the world’s existence during these tumultuous times. It feels like creation is collapsing. Could this be the end?

When the two disciples asked Jesus to stay with them, they didn’t know who he was. Their eyes were held back from recognizing Jesus. For them, a stranger had walked up behind them and joined their conversation. Perhaps he was a fellow pilgrim who had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and now was going home.

But this was no ordinary Passover. They claim that a prophet Jesus of Nazareth, who was mighty in word and deed, was betrayed by their own chief priests and Jewish rulers, crucified and that some of their women saw an angel who claimed Jesus was risen and the disciples did indeed find the tomb empty.

It was all too much. Their hope in Jesus was gone now that he was dead. Jesus was held as a modern prophet because his teaching and his miracles resembled the prophets of old. Moses was held up as the greatest of prophets because God spoke the words of the Torah to him and Moses worked more miracles than any other prophet.

Yet Moses promised that a prophet greater would arise from among Abraham’s descendants. God said to Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18*):  I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

So if Jesus were this prophet then how could he be dead? How could he let anyone arrest him and kill him? The prophet was supposed to lead God’s people to kill their Roman oppressors and not the other way around. To them, the Lord’s work of saving Israel was unfinished and all their hope in Jesus as the Saviour were buried with him in his tomb.

So they were stuck. Hopeless and disappointed they were returning to their daily chores feeling perhaps that they were still isolated from God who had given them such high hope in the prophet Jesus.

Their eyes were blind to see that it was Jesus risen from the dead even though the reports of his empty tomb were intriguing. But not as fascinating as what this stranger was teaching them. His bible study was blowing their minds. He was saying that the Scriptures stated that the Messiah was none other than God who had to die and rise again to enter his heavenly kingdom of glory.

When they arrived home, this stranger acted like he was headed somewhere else. They wanted to hear more. They invited him in. The stranger accepted their hospitality. They prepare some food. But now the stranger acts as if he is the host. He takes bread and blesses it and as he gives them this food, God opened their eyes to see that it was Jesus and that He was alive. And then He disappeared.

First of all that part of the bible that is referred to as the Old Testament, clearly teaches who Jesus is and all that we need to know about God’s salvation. The New Testament is its fulfillment. Faith in Christ comes from hearing God’s word and not seeing someone raised from the dead. Do you remember what Abraham said to the damned rich man in Luke 16? *“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”* Even doubting Thomas agrees with that now!

Why does it feel that we are alone in this pandemic? Does God not care that our economy is destroyed and so many are suffering? Will it all go away by reading the bible? Could it be that our eyes are closed to what the bible is saying?

Eyes are closed by opening ears to what is heard in the world. It says that the bible is myth. Jesus was only a man who taught high morals and virtues worthy of getting to live in this world. Only the strong survive and there is nothing after death.

No wonder it feels that we are alone. But God is greater than our hearts and His word is the very thing that creates and sustains all things. By His word He made the heavens and the earth. By his word He promised a Saviour who would deliver us from sin and death. By His word and water in baptism, God has made us new and given us faith and the Holy Spirit has come to us.

But there is more to Jesus being with us where two or three are gathered. It comes by way of a miracle. Jesus is present in His Supper. His body and blood are now with us in a sacramental presence of the living and ascended Lord who feeds us right where we are and gathered in His Name.

Christ is with us when He says take and eat my body given for you. Take and drink my blood shed for you. It was no accident that Jesus disappeared from the two disciples who were eating with Jesus in their homes. The Lord was teaching them not to trust their eyes but that He would be with them in His Supper.

So Jesus is present with us when the preaching proclaims His saving Gospel and He is present in the breaking of bread. Even now in these strange times when the Supper is suspended. The fasting from the Lord’s Supper is but for a brief time. It will come to an end. And we will gather again and celebrate the Lord’s nearness both now and in eternity.

We are not alone. Christ is risen from the dead and is still a prophet mighty in the word of his preaching and the miracle of the presence of his body and blood. See how He stays with us!

Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide (LSB 585)

1. Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,

For round us falls the eventide.

O let Your Word, that saving light,

Shine forth undimmed into the night.

2. In those last days of great distress

Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness

That we keep pure till life is spent

Your holy Word and Sacrament.

3. To hope grown dim, to hearts turned cold

Speak tongues of fire and make us bold

To shine Your Word of saving grace

Into each dark and loveless place.

4. May glorious truths that we have heard,

The bright sword of Your mighty Word,

Spurn Satan that Your Church be strong,

Bold, unified in act and song.

5. Restrain, O Lord, the human pride

That seeks to thrust Your truth aside

Or with some man-made thoughts or things

Would dim the words Your Spirit sings.

6. Stay with us, Lord, and keep us true;

Preserve our faith our whole life through –

Your Word alone our heart’s defense,

The Church’s glorious confidence.

Text: Philipp Melanchthon, 1497-1560

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