

Third Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2026

Text: Luke 24:13-35 (Gospel Reading)

Other Texts: Acts 2:14a-36-41 (First Reading); 1 Peter 1:13-25 (Epistle<sup>1</sup>)

### “Unseen but Present”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who is risen, triumphant over sin, death and the devil. Amen!

Today’s Gospel records the amazing account of the risen Jesus appearing to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. By giving yet another eyewitness account, St. Luke is assuring his readers of the most important event in history: *the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead*. For while we do need to believe what we cannot see,<sup>2</sup> yes, are even called blessed for doing that very thing,<sup>3</sup> the Bible is also adamant that our faith is not based upon myths, fairytales, or hopeful imagination, but on actual historical events.

In fact, Luke’s inclusion of the name Cleopas is important as it states, “This is what he said, you can ask him yourself,” since he was likely still alive at the time of writing. Something true of the majority of the apostles and other disciples, such as the 500 to whom Jesus appeared at one time,<sup>4</sup> Mary, Jesus’ mother, and others who were eyewitness that Luke had interviewed for writing his Gospel.<sup>5</sup> So all who read and hear Luke’s Gospel have that assurance that their faith, *our faith*, is based upon the rock-solid historical fact that Jesus is risen indeed!

Yes, Jesus Christ being risen from the dead is the major truth proclaimed in this text. But as is true of the Bible, there is more as well. For the fact that Jesus kept these two disciples from recognizing Him immediately shows that there must be more here than “just” seeing Him risen from the dead. So what else is revealed in this incredible Word from God?

First, is a great truth about the Word of God itself as Jesus explains *the Scriptures* to them. Indeed, it is likely that this is the main reason that Jesus did not let them recognize Him at first. Seeing Jesus would have overwhelmed them, causing anything He tried to teach them slip by in their awe and great joy. But not knowing it was Jesus speaking, they hear only the Word He speaks to them, and what a word it is! “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”<sup>6</sup>

Some accuse Christians of “crowbarring” Jesus into the Old Testament. I guess it makes sense when followers of Judaism, the false religion of the Pharisees, say that. But it is inexplicable when Christians do this. They no doubt see Jesus in the obvious messianic prophecies, but then

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<sup>1</sup> The appointed Epistle is 1 Peter 1:17-25. I have included vv. 13-16 as these are important verses which, unfortunately, are skipped in the lectionary reading.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:8.

<sup>3</sup> John 20:29.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6.

<sup>5</sup> See Luke 1:1-4. Here we see the Holy Spirit’s inspiration by making sure that people recollected events accurately and so also Luke’s recording of what he learned from them.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 24:27. All Scripture quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

teach that the majority of the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in the current nation of Israel, the rebuilding of the temple, and such. But according to Jesus, if you *don't* find Him in the Old Testament, *you have crowbarred Him out!*

So Jesus walked them through what we call the Old Testament. No doubt, He did use the specific prophecies. He began with Genesis 3:15, that He is the promised seed of the woman. He showed them that He is the seed of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed; the promised Son of David who would sit on the throne forever. He reminded them that one hung on a tree is cursed.<sup>7</sup> He reminded them that the prophecies and psalms that dealt with the Messiah's suffering always end with His victory, and His rule as God's anointed over all.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus pointed them to the types and symbols which pointed to Him: the temple and sacrifices, the offices of prophet, priest, and king, the bronze serpent on a pole, and others. He showed them how He was the faithful servant that Israel was called to be, but failed to be. That He was Israel reduced to one, and that Israel is being restored through Him, fulfilled in those who are united to Him by baptism and faith. So Christ Jesus and His Church on earth and in the glory of eternity, *that* is what the Old Testament is prophesying.

Jesus showed them in all these things and more how He needed to die by crucifixion to redeem the world to pay for sin and rise again to claim and rule His kingdom. All this and more He showed them, finding His person, His work, and the result of His work *in every book of the Old Testament*. And their hearts burned with wonder and joy as they grew in their understanding of the Scriptures and so became convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, that His crucifixion was part of God's plan of redemption, that He truly was risen and alive as the angels and women had said, and so that their hope was fulfilled, that He actually had redeemed Israel.

Now being properly instructed, their faith rekindled and strengthened, they were ready to see Him. Yet, Jesus waits longer, until they invite Him to join them for supper. And then He, their guest, acts as the host. And when He blessed and broke the bread, He then opens their eyes to recognize Him. And after being recognized, He then disappears from their sight.

And so this text also reveals an interesting rhythm: Jesus teaches, then He feeds. And His Church follows the pattern of being taught by Jesus and then being fed by Him. Today we continue this ancient pattern set by Christ Himself and followed by the true Church throughout her history in the Divine Service which consists of two parts, the Service of the Word, being instructed by Jesus, and the Service of the Sacrament, being fed His true body and blood by Him.

Much like those two disciples on the road, we often are walking in times of trouble and sorrow, our hearts filled with fears and doubts. Our griefs may vary from one another, and they may vary from year to year, even day to day. They may be relational, marital or family strife, or perhaps the opposite, a deep loneliness for the one who has not yet received the blessing of finding a godly spouse, has been widowed, or the deep grief of the repentant homosexual who daily struggles knowing that he or she may never enjoy the blessings of holy marriage.

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<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 21:23.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Psalm 2.

Maybe our sorrows are hurts caused by parents, words and actions of neglect and abuse. Maybe it is the child who once brought joy now bringing tears. It may be loved ones sick, hospitalized, nearing death, or already dying. It may be our own physical weaknesses, our own impending death. It may be the feeling of life being barren of all happiness, the shroud of depression darkening our daily existence no matter the circumstances.

In the midst of such gloom, Christ our Lord comes to us, walking with us on the road of life. Just as with these two disciples, He does so first of all by speaking to us through His Word, the Bible, and its correct preaching and teaching. Through it He tells us again the truths that we would lose sight of, or fail to see the relevance of. The truth that He died to redeem us, paying for our sin by His blood, which has taken God's anger away from us. The truth that that He is risen, overcoming sin, the world, death, and the devil, so that while these things attack us, causing the sorrow and grief we experience, we are reminded that we already have the victory over them by faith, and that we will enjoy that victory to the fullest in the new creation.

Truly Jesus reminds us through His Word something that we don't like to hear, but must hear, for only by such can we begin to understand each day's struggles and face them in confidence. The truth that like Christ Himself, we too must follow the path of the cross, of suffering and death, before we can behold the fullness of the glory that awaits us. But at the same time, our suffering is made holy by Christ's suffering, purifying our faith, the promise of God working good through it. And His victory and all these promises are made certain for you in the breaking of the bread, when you receive the body and blood of your crucified and risen Savior for the forgiveness of your sins and all the blessings that flow from it. By His presence in the Communion, the Lord Christ assures you that while He is unseen, He is with you always and that, with your sins forgiven, you will see Him in glory with your own resurrected eyes.

Fellow believers, like those two disciples, we also often fail to recognize Jesus' presence, don't we? And is this not caused by our own weakness of faith, our doubts and unbelief, our devoting too much of our mind, heart, and soul to the people and things of this life instead of on the life to come, our focusing too much on our trials, not enough on His Word and promises? And Jesus rebukes us, saying also to us, "O foolish ones...slow of heart to believe."<sup>9</sup>

Yet while our faith may be weak and struggling, our dear Savior does *not* give up on us. Yes, He rebukes sins and our slowness to believe, but He does so to make us realize we need to hear His Word more, dig into it deeper, for it is through His Word that He calms our troubled consciences, brings peace to our hearts, strengthens our faith and perseverance through whatever we face, making us confident in His forgiveness, presence, provision, protection, and salvation.

So dear Christians, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus invites you to tell Him your deepest concerns, fears, doubts and troubles, speaking to Him in prayer. And then hear Jesus speak to you through His Word and assure of His ongoing presence with you as revealed in the Holy Communion. For you can be sure that even though He is unseen, Jesus is risen. He is very alive and He is very present with you! Amen!

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 24:25.