

become our strength. It is then that our belief in the resurrection gives us hope that God can raise new life out of what is dying in our hearts. It is then that our faith begins to make the kind of difference that God intends it to make.

A mother and father are alone in their home. It is a beautiful, sunny day – the kind of day that invites children to run in the park and make up new games to play. But they seem unaware of its beauty. She busies herself around the home – dusting, cleaning, arranging – anything to keep her mind occupied. He stares out the living room window – choking back the tears – struggling with the memories.

A business executive walks out of the office after a meeting with a Vice President of the company. Sales are down. The economy shows no sign of picking up soon. Changes have to be made. It has nothing to do with performance or ability – we just can't continue on as we have done in the past. We'll give you six weeks severance and time with a career counselor. Don't worry. You'll find something soon. Let us know if we can help.

A boy walks home from school alone. The bus pulls away, filled with noise and commotion, but it is quiet on the street where he walks. He wishes that things weren't so different. He remembers the way life used to be. He wishes that he were 21, and able to be out on his own. He wishes that he didn't have to go to school every day, and suffer the kind of pain and embarrassment that he does.

At one time or another in our lives, we have all felt dismayed or discouraged. Certain events may have placed us in that position. We may have been there because of death or separation. We may have been there because of job loss, or family struggle. We may have been there because of illness or failure. The truth is: one way or another we have all been there, and we have all felt the pain that goes along with an experience like that.

That's exactly where our faith – and today's Gospel account – come in. For those who believe, there is a powerful God who will fall in step with us. A God who loves us enough to die for us. A God who is powerful enough to defeat death itself. A God who fell into step with Cleopas and the other on that first Easter afternoon, bringing them the good news of Jesus' resurrection. A God who continues to fall in step with us today whenever we find ourselves, like Cleopas, in need of that kind of comfort and strength and support. For those who believe, it is there to see.

It's told that this Bible story was one of Rembrandt's favorite ones. Several times he painted the scene where the eyes of Jesus' followers were opened. When he was young, he was intrigued by the drama of the event. He liked to think about the surprise that they must have felt, and the excitement in that moment of realization. He used very dramatic colors and lighting effects to re-create it on canvas. The viewer quickly senses the magnitude of the occasion. The intensity of the instant literally jumps off the canvas. But in his later years, he began to see the true meaning of the story. He began to look at it and see, not the drama of the event, but the different ways that those present were involved. He began to concentrate on the personal awakening that happened with those two followers.

In one of his works, we see this awakening in the expressive eyes of Cleopas, and at the very instant of his recognition, a servant offers a plate of food to him and appears to see nothing at all remarkable. Rembrandt knew that the key to this story was that some saw and some didn't. The power of God was real, but available only to the ones who were able to truly see what was happening. The ones who believed in the resurrected Jesus. The ones who were gifted with faith.

He realized that the true meaning of this story comes, not in the way that Jesus suddenly appeared or disappeared; not in the dramatic turn of events as they recognize him; not even in the cosmic miracle of the



resurrection. The true meaning of this story comes in the way that Cleopas and the other had their eyes opened to Christ's presence among them. In the midst of a long, slow, dark, depressing journey the power of the Risen Christ broke into their world, and was able to dispel their gloom and despair, and send them running back to Jerusalem with the news that he was alive.

As we reflect on this Gospel account, it is obvious that any of the three stories I shared with you earlier could have moved in one of two very different directions. The people involved could have been like the servant in Rembrandt's painting, and seen nothing extraordinary about their situation. They could have continued to see nothing but pain, and sorrow, and sadness. Life for them could have been a dreary existence - something to suffer through as best as they could. Or, they could have seen the situation through the eye of faith. Like Cleopas and his traveling companion, they could have seen that right there, in their darkest moment, there was someone with them. Someone who knew what it was like to be ridiculed, and suffer, and even experience death itself. Someone who was there to comfort and support them. Someone who was able to empower them, and give them hope.

That someone, of course, is Jesus Christ. He was there on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas. He was there in each of the three stories I shared with you. He is here with us this morning. And he is with you every day of your lives. This Easter Season we will be remembering the Easter story. But we will be remembering that it's not just a story about death and resurrection. It's not just a story about the beginning of the Christian church. It's not just a story about Jesus and the disciples. It's also a story about you and me. For those of us whose lives are graced with faith, our Lord is every bit as present today, in the breaking of the bread and the power of the Word, as he was in that first century. Conquering the darkness of our lives. Offering us the gifts of faith and hope. Traveling with us, even when our journey is long and slow and dark and depressing.

May God grant that each of us be touched by the power of the resurrection. As that happens, may we recognize the Christ who falls in step with us, walking with us, talking with us, breaking bread with us, and carrying us through the best and the worst of what life has to offer. Happy Easter, friends. May that be something more than Easter eggs and bunnies: something that brings us faith and strength and hope and life.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (April 18, 2005)

English Text: ii

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over 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 took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed 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 they did not see him." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. ⁱⁱⁱ

Greek Text:

¹³Καὶ ἰδοὺ δύο ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἦσαν πορευόμενοι εἰς κώμην ἀπέχουσαν σταδίου ἐξήκοντα ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ, ἣ ὄνομα Ἐμμαοῦς, ¹⁴καὶ αὐτοὶ ὠμίλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ πάντων τῶν συμβεβηκότων τούτων. ¹⁵καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὁμιλεῖν αὐτοὺς καὶ συζητεῖν καὶ αὐτὸς Ἰησοῦς ἐγγίσας συνεπορεύετο αὐτοῖς, ¹⁶οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγινῶναι αὐτόν. ¹⁷εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· τίνες οἱ λόγοι οὗτοι οὗς ἀντιβάλλετε πρὸς ἀλλήλους περιπατοῦντες; καὶ ἐστάθησαν σκυθρωποί. ¹⁸ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ εἰς ὄνοματι Κλεοπάς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· σὺ μόνος παροικεῖς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις; ¹⁹καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ποῖα; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· τὰ περὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ, ὃς ἐγένετο ἀνὴρ προφήτης δυνατὸς ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ, ²⁰ὅπως τε παρέδωκαν αὐτόν οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ ἀρχοντες ἡμῶν εἰς κρίμα θανάτου καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν. ²¹ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠλπίζομεν ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ὁ μέλλων λυτροῦσθαι τὸν Ἰσραὴλ· ἀλλὰ γε καὶ σὺν πάνσιν τούτοις τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει ἀφ' οὗ ταῦτα ἐγένετο. ²²ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναῖκες τινες ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξέστησαν ἡμᾶς, γενόμεναι ὀρθρῖναι ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον, ²³καὶ μὴ εὑροῦσαι τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἦλθον λέγουσαι καὶ ὀπτασίαν ἀγγέλων ἑωρακέσαι, οἱ λέγουσιν αὐτόν ζῆν. ²⁴καὶ ἀπηλθον τινες τῶν σὺν ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ εὔρον οὕτως καθὼς καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες εἶπον, αὐτόν δὲ οὐκ εἶδον. ²⁵καὶ αὐτὸς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· ὦ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ τοῦ πιστεῦν ἐπὶ πάνσιν οἷς ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται· ²⁶οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ; ²⁷καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.

²⁸Καὶ ἤγγισαν εἰς τὴν κώμην οὗ ἐπορεύοντο, καὶ αὐτὸς προσεποιήσατο πορρώτερον πορεύεσθαι. ²⁹καὶ παρεβίασαντο αὐτόν λέγοντες· μείνον μεθ' ἡμῶν, ὅτι πρὸς ἑσπέραν ἐστὶν καὶ κέκλικεν ἡδη ἡ ἡμέρα. καὶ εἰσηλθεν τοῦ μείναι σὺν αὐτοῖς. ³⁰καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ κατακλιθῆναι αὐτόν μετ' αὐτῶν λαβῶν τὸν ἄρτον εὐλόγησεν καὶ κλάσας ἐπέδιδου αὐτοῖς, ³¹αὐτῶν δὲ διηνοιχθησαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν· καὶ αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο ἀπ' αὐτῶν. ³²καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς ἀλλήλους· οὐχὶ ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν [ἐν ἡμῖν] ὡς ἐλάλει ἡμῖν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, ὡς διήνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς; ³³Καὶ ἀναστάντες αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ εὔρον ἠθροισμένους τοὺς ἕνδεκα καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς, ³⁴λέγοντας ὅτι ὄντως ἠγέρθη ὁ κύριος καὶ ὤφθη Σίμωνι. ³⁵καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐξηγοῦντο τὰ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ καὶ ὡς ἐγνώσθη αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου. ^{iv}

ⁱ This mid-week devotional message is available through the Internet to all interested friends and supporters of Saint Peter Lutheran Church in Englewood, Colorado. To add your name to or remove your name from the distribution list, please send a message from your Internet address to drisendal@StPLC.org. These devotional messages can also be found on the World Wide Web at www.StPLC.org.

ⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Luke 24:13-35, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^{iv} St. Luke 24:13-35, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.