

Third Sunday of Easter
April 10, 2016

Pastor Lew Upchurch
Luke 24:13-35

“The Living Christ”

During the long flight home from Southern California last Sunday, I took the opportunity to review the large stack of *Confirmation Worship Summaries* I had in my bag. If you aren't aware, each of our confirmation students is required to complete seven of these per year where they summarize the sermon, reflect on which hymn or song they liked the best, and maybe comment on something they noticed during the service like different colors or candles. They have to do their best to answer all of the questions but at the bottom is a space for **them** to ask a question. This is optional and of the hundreds of these summaries I have read since September, most kids do not ask questions. Of course, some do. A recent question was “What did Pastor Lew give up for Lent?” Another recent one was, “Why do we use certain colors throughout the church year.” Good questions. But as I made my way through the stack last Sunday, I came across one student's worship summary that had this question: “What will happen when we don't have anything to talk about in church because we learned it all?”

Now, at first I thought to myself “this kid has a lot of nerve to ask a question like that.” There will always be a lot to talk about in church because we have faith in the crucified and risen Christ. The crucified and risen Christ that is here with us in worship and who is with us all the time giving us hope and directing our ways. But then it dawned on me that this student was probably not thinking about Christ like that. He, just like many adults, was probably thinking of Christ as someone we simply learn about.

Now, of course learning about Christ is a good thing— don't get me wrong— especially in Confirmation class. Learning about his life and his ministry—his miracles and his mission is super important for all of us. But our faith is based on

the resurrection. Think about this. **Why do we believe in Jesus?** Not why do we know about Jesus, **but why do we believe in Jesus?** Because of his resurrection! If there was no resurrection, then there could be no hope at all because we would be putting our faith in a dead man! Paul, writing to the Corinthians, reminded them of this. "If Christ is not raised from the dead, then the gospel is a lie and your faith is worthless because you're still dead in your sins. (1 Cor.15:12-17). And this is true for you and me today. We believe in Jesus Christ because he was raised from the dead. And this is the foundation of our own hope that we and all who die in Christ will, like Him, share in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

But for many, because they can't see Christ, they settle for knowing about him but can't really grasp what he means in their lives. He's kind of this mystical guy that seems like a good person to know about, but to know for sure if he is actually there, is a hard thing to grasp. Maybe for some of you here today, whose lives are messed up at the moment or you're in the middle of some big decisions that are causing you a lot of anxiety, maybe you're wondering why we keep talking about how much this whole resurrection thing matters because it sure seems like your life is pretty stressful and crappy. Maybe you're wondering that if it's true, then where is Christ in the middle of your troubles and pains? Maybe you **know** about him but have absolutely no expectation of seeing him or experiencing him in any way.

That was certainly the case for Cleopas and his companion as they walked down the road toward Emmaus. They were leaving town pretty bummed out— their hope was crushed— because their hope was crucified on Friday. Jesus was dead. It was over. They had no expectation of ever seeing him again. Life for them it seemed, was messed up and pretty crappy as well.

The text tells us that in their despair, as they were discussing all that had happened, this man comes up and starts walking and talking with them. The bible, of course, says this man is Jesus. But Cleopas and his friend couldn't see him for who he was. They were apparently so down and out that their eyes were

kept from recognizing him. And instead of smacking them back into reality, Jesus asked “What are you guys talking about?” They’re like, what? “Haven't you heard? Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened? Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was a great prophet, mighty in word and deed before God and all the people, was delivered by our chief priests and rulers to be crucified. We had hoped this man was the one to redeem Israel but now he’s dead.”

Jesus, who they had yet to recognize, listened to all they had to say and then dropped this whopper on them: **“O you foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. It was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things before going to his glory.”** And then he opened the Scriptures. He interpreted to them from Moses to the prophets all that was said of Him. He didn't hand them a book written by someone else about who he was. He opened the living Word of the Bible, where he dwells and speaks. Later Cleopas and his friend said that their “hearts burned within while he opened to them the Scriptures.”

And the same is true for you. Even as you journey down the road of life, a road that might lead to hopes and dreams crushed or things not working out the way you expected them to be, as was the case with Cleopas and his friend, know that the risen Christ is there empowering you! How can you know that? You know, not just because you know about him or have read a book about him. You know because He gives you His Holy Scriptures—the living Word of God, which delivers his powerful living presence. We Lutherans call this a means of grace. The pages of his Word is one of the specific ways God gives us the forgiveness, life, and salvation which Christ has won for us. So in this life, as you journey along the way, turn to his powerful word through the good times and the bad. Dig into the Scriptures and experience the presence of the living Christ!

But wait, there’s more! In the story, when the two men get to Emmaus, they thought Jesus was going to leave. “Stay with us,” they begged. I can imagine them saying something like, “We thought we lost everything this weekend and

now you are here. Please don't go." The text says that Jesus sat down at table with them, took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. Now these words should sound very familiar. In fact only two chapters earlier, Jesus said the same words at the Last Supper. But this time, he broke the bread, gave it to them, and then... he vanished from their sight. He disappeared. Cleopas and his companion's eyes were opened and they recognized him but now they couldn't see the risen Christ. Where did He go? Was he playing tricks on them using his Divine Jesus powers? No, the living Christ was there for them and they knew this because his Word was still there and the bread was still there.

And the same is true for you and me. The living Christ will continue to be there for us as we journey down the road. He is our Savior who is not in some far off place that we have to go and find. He is near to us in His Word and Sacraments and comes to us forgiving our sins, strengthening our faith, and empowering us to face the challenges of this life. Like the old hymn we sang earlier reminds us, there really is power in the blood of the risen Christ.

You know, I'm glad that confirmation student asked the question, "What will happen when we don't have anything to talk about in church because we learned it all?" We all needed to hear it because the truth is we all might get a little bored with all this Jesus stuff. We get it, we think. We learned it all. But then something happens and the going gets tough. That something might even cause us to lose our hope. And like Cleopas and his friend, that something might even keep our eyes from recognizing the power of the resurrected Christ. We might have learned about Him but that knowledge doesn't help us or empower us when we've lost all hope. But through our faith in the risen Christ, hope is not something we ever have to loose no matter what happens in this life, because the Lord is risen indeed! He loves us and through our faith in Him will be with us "until the end of the age" no matter what. And that's worth talking about.

As Peter writes, we have "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, to an inheritance kept in heaven for us." It's a hope in the living Christ. Thanks be to God for it! **Amen.**