

In the name of our Risen Lord Jesus, dear friends,

I think you know the feeling.

Imagine hearing something so unthinkable...so out-of-the-blue...so devastating that your head hangs down, it's hard to think, to rearrange your thoughts and put them in order. You're bewildered, beside yourself, disappointed, discouraged, despondent. You have a hard time focusing or even looking people in the eye. It's like innocently turning around only to be smacked in the face with 2x4. Everything seems hopeless and life doesn't seem to hold the importance it used to. You might very well know how that feels. Some of you know that feeling all too well.

There's a book I became so immersed in that it stirred those kinds of feelings about my faith in Jesus in a "what if" kind of way. I know that at least a few of you have also read it. Here's how the author of *A Skeleton In God's Closet* begins the prologue: *The archaeological discovery threatened to tear Western Civilization off its hinges. One out of every three people on earth was affected—some 1,800,000,000 whose lives were suddenly, brutally wrenched out of joint. It was like waking up one morning to find that a week had ten days, that there were forty-three minutes in each hour, or that one counted "1,2,8,4,5."*

What Paul Maier's story goes on to deal with is exactly what the Emmaus disciples were going through on their 7-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus: that apparently Jesus had died and that was the end of the story.

Easter was two weeks ago, but the Easter Season of the Church Year continues, so we are **STILL TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION**. As we consider the factual account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (and a favorite of many Christians), we find that:

- 1. THE DISCIPLES WERE NOT TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION (13-24)**
- 2. JESUS WAS AND STILL IS TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION (25-32)**
- 3. YOU AND I SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION! (33-35)**

Two men—disciples of Jesus, but not of the 12 apostles—began a sad walk to the city of Emmaus on Easter Sunday. They were talking about everything that had gone on in Jerusalem over the previous few days. What is lost to us as we read the English translation before us is the kind of discussion they had. The Greek words used here give us the sense that this was a lively, animated discussion. They were discussing, disputing, questioning, perhaps even arguing about what it meant that Jesus was tried, crucified and died. They were trying to make sense of the reports of people who had visited the tomb. But despite the animated discussion, their morale could not have been lower.

As they discussed and debated these things, Jesus merged with them on the path, but they didn't recognize who he was. To them, he was a stranger. And how strange he seemed to be! Apparently he was not even aware of the big news out of Jerusalem, the news of the prophet called Jesus, who was crucified! This was big-time news and everyone knew—or apparently not! This so dumbfounded Cleopas that he didn't even give a straight answer to this stranger's question when Jesus asked, ***"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"*** The two of them just stood there under a cloud of despair. Then Cleopas answers the question with another question, ***"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened here in these days?"***

Their faces were downcast, it says. The actual word used there means “gloomy.” Their faces were sad and gloomy. When this stranger wanted to know what was going on, the walking stopped. They just stood there looking...gloomy. So Jesus asked again, **“What things?”**

This was their answer: ***About Jesus of Nazareth....He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.***

Not only were these guys confused, they were absolutely heartbroken that apparently Jesus had not risen from the dead. Even though they relate what the women who were at the tomb said, they didn't think he was alive. There are three key things that they said.

We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. This is the ultimate sad and gloomy phrase, isn't it? They had pinned their hopes on Jesus to be the one who would “redeem” or “buy them back” from their sins. They thought he was the Savior, but that past tense tells us that their hope had disappeared.

The next key phrase is, ***And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.*** In other words, it's all the more hopeless! To me, it is stunning that they said—out loud—the words “the third day” and didn't recall Jesus promising to rise on the third day! But maybe they never heard that from his lips and I certainly cannot fully appreciate being there, in that moment, seeing Jesus cruelly tortured and die and what that does to emotions and rational thinking.

The other key statement is the last one: ***but him they did not see.*** Yeah, the grave was empty, but those who went to the grave—they ones they heard from—never saw Jesus, only an empty tomb. In these disciples' minds, If Jesus really had risen from the dead like he promised, certainly he would have appeared to them! This was a tragic loss—absolutely devastating. After all, what good was a dead Jesus? All hope was lost.

We might wonder why Jesus pretended not to know what they're talking about and why he let them believe that he was simply another stranger on the road. It doesn't tell us exactly, but perhaps it was to delay their excitement over seeing the risen Lord until he had the opportunity to teach them and build up their sagging faith. At any rate, when the camouflaged Christ heard from their own lips what was wrong with them, he rebuked them: ***How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?***

As Jesus TALKED ABOUT THE RESURRECTION, he reminded them that his suffering and death was foretold by the prophets, that these were things that had to happen to the Savior. Only after that could he rise again, proclaiming victory over sin and death. It maybe sounds a little severe when Jesus calls them “fools.” But it is a bit of a strong word that implies their unwillingness to understand. They really should have put these things together and believed. Jesus further indicates their weak faith, saying that they were “**slow of heart to believe.**” But in love for them, Jesus goes back to the Scriptures (Moses and the prophets) and teaches them the way of salvation through faith in the Christ. Little do they know at this point that he is that very Savior!

If you are like me, you can relate with those Emmaus disciples. We have trouble understanding what we read in Scripture sometimes. We have weak faiths sometimes too. Jesus TALKED ABOUT THE

RESURRECTION and all that had to precede it so that those disciples might believe and be saved. Jesus is STILL TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION so that you and I and many others will also believe and be saved. The way Jesus does that today is through his Holy Word.

We call Jesus “The Living Lord”, because he did rise from the dead on Easter, proclaiming victory over sin and death. We also call the Bible the “Living Word” because God himself says that ***the Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12)***. It is preached and taught and listened to, and when it enters our ears and hearts it does some work. And you’ve felt that work in your heart, haven’t you?

That Living Word calls us “fools” as it cuts us deeply, revealing our sins and imperfections before a perfect God who demands perfection from us. It burns our ears as we are mindful of our spiritual doubts and we hear it reprimand us for being slow to believe.

But then it miraculously heals those painful and damning wounds as God announces that Jesus’ death on the cross paid for exactly those sins and that we are forgiven. The Word is alive and working within us to remove our guilty consciences, the burden of our sin and our weak wonderings about God.

There’s no reason for faithless gloom and sadness, no reason to wonder whether or not we will go to heaven. We have a Living Lord who has won salvation for us and a Living Word which works in us so that we may believe that Christ has died and Christ has risen and that we will live with him when Christ comes again. Jesus is STILL TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION as he speaks to you and me through his Word.

As Jesus spoke to those disciples on the way into town, he acted as if he was not stopping over in Emmaus but going on. But they really wanted this knowledgeable teacher to stay with them. They were also being hospitable, as was their custom. It was culturally proper for them to invite this traveler in and proper for him to accept. But Jesus had more in mind than eating and resting in their home. As they sat down at the table to eat, Jesus assumes the leadership role and breaks the bread. He does not forget to pray first, you notice. It is at that moment that Jesus chose to reveal his true identity. Maybe when he unfolded those sacred hands from prayer, tore the bread in half and handed it to them, they noticed the nail marks or maybe their eyes were simply opened by Jesus to see who he really was. In any case, now they knew! But then, immediately, he vanished!

It was no longer important for him to be there with these men. What was important for them was to have Jesus talk to them about the resurrection, build up their faith, and show them that he had indeed risen from the dead. Again, it is just as critical that Jesus STILL TALKS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION to you and me today through his Word.

How do you react when Jesus talks to you? The reason I ask that is because of what Luke tells us happens after Jesus revealed himself to those disciples. Let’s hear that again: ***They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.***

When Jesus spoke to them and showed them that he was the Savior, it gave them knowledge and strength and a powerful emotional surge! They don’t even seem like the same sad and gloomy and doubting men we saw at the beginning! That’s because they weren’t!

And we have no reason to be either. Oh, our sinful nature drags us down. We can act and feel just like those guys did. We can be just as uncertain about God, our faith, Jesus, and heaven. We can be filled with doubt and misunderstanding and sagging morale. We can let the devil get the upper hand in our lives. But when Jesus comes to us in his Word, and tells us that he is indeed risen and that our sins are forgiven because he has paid the price and that we're going to heaven because he says so, our whole attitude changes! I hope we get a little excited about that! In fact, it would be nice if we all appreciated what Jesus has done for us as much as those disciples did! Wouldn't it be great if we were all filled with the same measure of joy they had when they realized that their hopes had been *fulfilled*—that Jesus had *redeemed* them after all!

Look at what they did. They realized they did have a Savior and they immediately went to tell people. They didn't make up a whole bunch of excuses like:

"But I'm tired from walking all the way from Jerusalem, I don't want to walk another 7 miles back. I just sat down."

"Come on, can't we just go in the morning?"

"Man, I just walked all that way, and I haven't even gotten to eat yet!"

They were so happy that they literally dropped everything to go spread the word that Jesus did rise from the dead and that everyone should be filled with happiness and hope!

What a bunch of whiners we can be, huh?

"Oh, I'm too shy to tell people about Jesus".

"I work all day, I need my nights and weekends for me. I can't help with outreach."

"I'm not going to say anything about God to people at work, they're going to think I'm weird."

"We can do evangelism work some other time, can't we?"

We need to know this morning that Jesus forgives even our sins of unwillingness to share him with others. As we appreciate and enjoy that full and free forgiveness, let's be reminded that he really has made us his witnesses, his representatives, his ambassadors to this world. His only plan for saving people is for you and me, his disciples today, to share the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus.

When those disciples heard and saw Jesus, those weary feet of theirs were re-sandaled and they raced back to Jerusalem to tell the good news. Do you feel the excitement? Do you realize the urgency to tell others before they are lost in despair or lost eternally? Is your heart filled with resurrection joy and thanksgiving? STILL TALKING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION? YOU AND I SHOULD BE! May the Easter message and the joy and hope of your own salvation inspire you to do it! Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**