

## Luke 24:13-35

April 30, 2017

What do you need today? That was the premise of Peter's sermon in Acts 2. When he was done preaching about sin and death, forgiveness and life, the people had to ask ... what shall we do? They knew what they needed. They needed rescue. They needed forgiveness. What should they do? Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children.

So, what do you need? I don't need anything. I am my own person, strong, self-sufficient. The truth is that we are all dependent. God created us to be dependent, on Him, and on each other. You need forgiveness and you have come to the right place. Jesus died for you. You need the comfort of the Holy Spirit and you have come to the right place. Jesus has poured out His Spirit on you in baptism. You need fellowship with Jesus and you have that too. Perhaps what you really need is encouragement. You need your spirits lifted and your weariness tended to. Time and again we need to be directed back to God's Word and grace and God's promises. We need to be lifted up. We live in a sin-filled world. We are awash in the consequences of our fallen nature. There is temptation around us. There is sickness and death in our midst and there is never a shortage of people to pray for/

As we look for encouragement today, I want to start with a question based on the Gospel today. Why did Jesus choose to remain unrecognized for so long? Here are two disciples desperately in need of encouragement. It looks as if Jesus is holding out on them. Is He just teasing them and stringing them along? Is this some cruel April Fool's joke? Why doesn't He just get on with it and show them who He is? Remember the man born blind in John 9? Jesus healed him of his blindness, but not right away. He did it in the strangest way. First He made mud and put it on the man's eyes. Then told him to go stumble his way across town to wash it off. Only then was he able to see. Why not just do it? Why the theatrics? Why the delay? Why did Jesus not want him to see who had healed him? What could be more important? It was more important for him to understand and believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Remember at the tomb when Jesus told Mary that she couldn't just keep holding on to Him? There was something very important that she had to do besides stay there at the tomb. She now knew something that Jesus needed her to share. She had a mission, to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. In today's Gospel, there was something that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus needed more than they needed to see Jesus alive and in the flesh in front of them. They needed to see Jesus present throughout the pages of God's Word. They needed to see Jesus present in the Lord's Supper. They needed a foundation for their faith that was not dependent on what they could see. Here's why: Jesus would not always be visibly present with His disciples. They needed something else to hang their faith on.

Do you remember what Jesus said to Thomas? *"You believe because you have seen me; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed."* They needed a foundation for their faith that was not built on simply seeing Jesus alive. After all, there would be generations of believers after them who would not have that opportunity. St. Paul writes, *"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

Is your life built around the encouragement of the Scriptures? Is your confidence each day, or lack thereof, based on God's Word or on your feelings and experience? Do you always feel forgiven, or do you wonder and worry? Do you feel guilty? Do you seek some outside evidence so you can believe? Do you long for a sign from heaven, a miracle, a specific answer to a specific prayer? What's going to happen to your faith if you don't get it? What's going to happen to your faith if you do get it and you start trusting in what you feel or experience? Building your faith on the foundation of feelings and experience is dangerous. In the time between when Jesus started to walk with the two disciples and when He revealed himself to them, what did Jesus share with them? What brought about the change that made their hearts burn within them? It was when Jesus talked with them on the road *and when He opened the Scriptures to them*. These two disciples were suffering that day because they didn't feel as though Jesus was with them. To their experience and understanding, He was gone. Jesus knew that He would not always be physically present with them, so He needed to give them a foundation that was not based on seeing Jesus or even on feeling His presence.

Back in December of 1979, Mother Teresa travelled to Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. To many people, she was a living saint, an example of Christian faith and devotion. Twenty-eight years later, she would reveal her secret to the world. She had written that her life was like a living hell. Why? I was because she felt no presence of God. All her speeches, her television appearances, were just that, appearances. Her smile, she said, was a mask. Underneath her deeds of Christian charity she believed and confessed that she was troubled because she could not *feel* God's presence.

Many people today continue to search for a confirmation of God through their physical senses, their emotions or through spiritual visions. If they don't get it, they are driven closer and closer to despair. If they do get it, they start to trust their feelings, and that "leads to the dark side." Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther wrote that it is very dangerous to put your confidence in God's nearness on the basis of your feeling: "If we want to follow our feeling, we shall decide that we are bereft of all help from the Holy Spirit and that we have been utterly banished from the presence of God."

If you are tempted to confirm your faith by how emotional you feel about your spirituality, be careful. Are you depending on God's unchanging truth or on your ever-changing emotions? You see, God promises to create and sustain faith in your heart not as a result of seeing sensational events, but as a result of hearing, of receiving His living word through your eyes and ears. In John 6, Jesus had reached the height of His popularity among the people. They were being entertained. They were being fed. They were seeing miracles. But when Jesus told them that He was the bread of life, and that they needed to eat the flesh of the Son of Man, many of them turned away. Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you leave too?" And Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life."

Witnessing a resurrection from the dead might be sensational, but it is not faith-creating. Walking down the road and bumping into the risen and glorified Christ might be awe-inspiring, but it is not faith-sustaining. It is Jesus' Word and Sacraments that create faith. It is these means of grace that give us hope and sustain us when the storms of life threaten us. Seeing a miracle or evidence of an unusual event does not create faith. Consider the Israelites in the wilderness after they left Egypt and set out for the Promised Land. What miracles did they witness over a span of forty years? "*Our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*" But according to St. Paul in 1 Corinthians, did it help? "*Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert*"

In Jesus' own public ministry there were towns that suffered His reproach because they did not repent after seeing the miracles He performed. Jesus' most spectacular miracles were often met with unbelief. Faith does not come by seeing miracles. It does not come through personal spiritual events. Faith is produced by the seed which God sows in our hearts. That seed is the Word of God. When God comes to you in His Word, He is planting His seed. The fruit of God's seed in your heart is His gift of faith. Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.

In Martin Luther's day, there was a great trend to find God and achieve faith through miracles, visions, extraordinary spiritual experiences, and even relics. People today count the Word of God as unreliable and they seek signs instead. They want spiritual experiences and signs and miracles. They want inner feelings of the nearness of God and when they don't happen they despair. Don't you know that the Word of God is what makes us wise unto salvation? The Word is profitable, it is God-breathed. Jesus says, "*Search the Scriptures, for they testify about me.*" If you had been a fly on the wall that day as Jesus opened the Scriptures to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, what would you have heard? "*Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*"

Is that a surprise? Does the Old Testament talk about Jesus? Let's take a tour. Genesis 3 ... Adam and Eve sinned. They have a broken relationship with God and impending death and eternal separation. God cursed the serpent. God cursed the ground but God promised Adam and Eve a Saviour. One day the seed of the woman would fix that which was broken and bring all of creation back to God forever.

Genesis 12 ...

Genesis 22 ...

There's the Passover Lamb in Exodus

There's the Rock that gave water to sustain them

There's the Lamb of God who carries away sin in Leviticus

There's the Serpent lifted up on a pole in Numbers

Can you see Jesus here?

Isaiah 53:4-6, *"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all"*

John 5:39, *"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify about Me"*

Is it a coincidence that Jesus took the place of the host at the disciples' home in Emmaus and that they recognized Him when He broke the bread? It is Word and Sacrament that build faith and salvation on the foundation of God's unchanging Word. God grows your faith through mundane things like sermons, Bible studies, Confession and Absolution, the Lord's Supper, things that look unexciting to the world, and yet they bring the Gospel to our hearts and it is the power of God for salvation.

We need to receive God's forgiveness and be sustained by it not just once in a while, not occasionally, but regularly. Our minds have been damaged by sin and our memory is limited. How does this medicine get into our hearts? It is through our ears as we hear Christ-centred sermons and teaching in Bible Classes. It is through our mouths when we receive Jesus' body and blood in the sacrament. It comes through our eyes when we read His Word in daily devotions and Bible reading. God also gives us this blessed forgiveness as we do what those two disciples did that evening. Their hearts were burning within them and they went as quickly as they could to go and share the news with their friends. Martin Luther calls it the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints. It's a fancy way of saying that we share Jesus and His Word with one another.

The only real encouragement I can bring someone who is hurting and sad is the encouragement that comes from God's promises. It doesn't help much to say to someone, "I know how you feel." Many times we can't know how that person feels. I don't pretend to know how a husband feels as he stands over the bed of his wife in ICU while the machines do their work of keeping her alive as she lies there at the edge of death. He shares with me the many years of marriage they have enjoyed. He shares with me the good times and the bad times. He shares with me how helpless he now feels. What can I say to him that is of any consequence? The only thing that can bring them any comfort is the sure and certain word and promise of God. Everything else is fluff. As we talked, I began with the invocation. Then I asked, "What promises did God make to your wife in baptism?" Then we read a Psalm and asked, what promises does God make there? Then we prayed the Lord's Prayer and remember still more promises.

It is through sharing the Word of the Gospel, that we can point people to Jesus, who does know how they feel, and who loves them and cares for them. We are called to encourage one another with the one unique thing we have, the good news of the Gospel. Jesus has broken the power of sin and has conquered death. On that first Easter the sadness and despair divided the disciples. Thomas just wanted to be alone. The women went to the tomb, alone. Two disciples just wanted to go home and grieve by themselves, alone, until suddenly the joy of salvation drew them together. Encouraging one another in faith and Christian living is so important for our life together. We need each other. We need to look after each other. We need to have a connection with one another that gives us the freedom to share our needs, our sorrows with each other. And we need to be prepared at a moment's notice to share the hope that is within us. There's something that happens to us when we hear, read and receive His Word of forgiveness and life regularly. Our hearts burn within us. There grows in us the joy of salvation. God leads and enables us to tell others about the Good News of their forgiveness in Christ so that they can share that joy too.