

**Sermon for Sunday, April 30, 2017 Synod Assembly**

**+Bishop Aitken**

**Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35**

In the name of Christ, who walks beside us, behind us and before us,  
And who never leaves us alone on our journey of life and faith;

This is Bishop Tom Aitken, of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod. I bring you thanks for the good work of Christ you live out in your daily life, and through your congregation, synod and church; the ELCA. Because God gives you faith, you have become a blessing to children without parents, to those fleeing famine, violence and war. You've been part of raising up leaders for a new generation of congregations and helped fund disaster relief around the world. Thank you – and do not grow weary in these good works, done out of joy that God chooses you to do them and empowers you with the Spirit!

The sermon I am about to give, is the sermon more than 400 voting members and guests will be hearing at the Annual Synod Assembly of 135 congregations on April 30<sup>th</sup>.

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The deepest truth people experienced in Jesus was the profound experience of love, God's love. It was a love that wouldn't quit on anybody. Jesus spent his time bringing this powerful love to everyone he met. And it didn't matter who they were, or where they were in life. You could be wealthy or poor, resident or alien in the land; you could be single or married, strong or weak, sad or happy, healthy or deathly ill, part of the dominant culture or you could be, as so many were, marginalized. No one who experienced Jesus was the same again. Jesus' love transformed people; it gave them new eyes to see and new purpose to live.

That's what happens in today's Gospel: According to Luke, it's Easter Sunday, the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead. Two followers of Jesus, Cleopas and his un-named companion were walking back home from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Though not part of the eleven, the two had talked with them earlier in the day and had encountered this love of God and this transformation of heart that Jesus brought to people. Jesus was their friend, mentor, and savior. They knew or had personally witness his courage, his healing, his radical forgiveness and the announcement of the full Reign of God that was coming because of him. They may well have also been at the foot of the cross when Jesus died.

But the only thing they knew for sure at that moment on the road home was Jesus was dead. They were going home, sad. Their hopes were dashed. Oh, there were a few "idle" tales about some angels a few rumors about an empty tomb, some reports of some women – seeing a vision of Christ and so forth.....but it was over, really for them. Their expectations of Jesus were destroyed..

Have you "been there" on that kind of journey? Have your hopes been pulverized, your expectations of God destroyed by some incident in your life? Were promises you counted on not fulfilled? Has your faith been battered around and challenged to the breaking point? And have you just packed it all in and gone home to the old way of life?

As they were walking, a "stranger" joined them. It's Jesus, but they don't know it. He comes alongside them, he listens to them and their despair. *God always comes to us, right where we are, we say as Christians. As Lutheran Christians we especially emphasize this, it is the wonderfully scandalous reality of grace!* Jesus asks them what they are talking about. They are surprised this stranger doesn't know, "Are you the only one who doesn't know about Jesus crucified and dead?.....We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel," they say. They share their crushed dreams with him

The average American receives 6,000 messages per day. There's a relentless parade of news, real or fake, and it's non-stop! Whether it's CNN, FOX NEWS, The Daily Skimm, Twitter Feeds, Facebook or Snap chat, we are bombarded with data and information and most of it is not life-giving, most of it is violent news, sad news or meaningless chatter. Will the love of God be heard in all of this? Hurt and angry about life, afraid for the future, confused by mixed messages we often narrow our vision, our convictions, our hopes and our faith to a very small world of self-preservation and benign and safe little trinket projects that keep us numbed. We are going home to the hopeless normalcy our culture demands of us.

But Jesus won't have it. Not now, not then. He is faithful to his task and he finds us where we are in life just like he found Cleopas and his companion on their sad trip back home. He carefully teaches them what God is all about by revealing the meaning of Scriptures – and that meaning points to himself as the Word of God that brings new life. In a way, what Jesus is doing for these two is saying, I see you know what Scripture **says** – but I will tell you what it **means!**

They reach Emmaus. It is dark. In good Mediterranean style they invite the “stranger” in. There is some bread there, and some wine and oil. Then Jesus does something you and I can't miss: He Takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And he is gone from their sight. They begin to realize that their hearts were burning with new joy and zeal, back on the road as Jesus spoke with them and finally as he shared the bread with them. With that bread still in their hands, in their bodies, they go back to Jerusalem, now with joy, to find the others. Is there any wonder we discover Jesus in Scripture, water, bread and wine today, just as they did?

I love Martin Luther's sermon on Luke 24 and this story: Listen to his words:

It is, therefore, his purpose to teach us by this narrative, given for our instruction and consolation, how his work is to be done in the Christian church after his resurrection, namely, that he will not reject nor cast out those who are weak in their faith, yea, not even those who are held in error or ignorance, or who are otherwise weak, fearful, and despairing. They are rather the very persons in whom he will exercise and manifest the power of his resurrection, not only by inviting them to come to him, but also by coming to them, and treating them in the gentlest and kindest way, talking with them, teaching and instructing them, yea, even eating with them, until at length they grow strong and secure in their faith; while their hearts, so sad and sorrowful for a time, are again filled with joy. Thus we also should know and have this comforting assurance that he is our Lord who is able to bear with our infirmities and to overlook them; that he will not reject and condemn those unable to believe.....”

Christian, wherever you are on your journey of faith Jesus comes alongside of you. He is not through with you, in good times or bad. And it doesn't matter what age or situation; when we are kids and teenagers, when we are in our 20's, 30's midlife or seniors Jesus doesn't quit on us. He comes, often disguised *as he himself said several times in the gospels*. He is here, among us in the gathered community of faith all around the world this morning. He is present in the gospel spoken, the bread broken, the wine poured and on our lips. Really present, we are bold to say as Lutherans, in a holy mystery.

Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not yet come,  
Come to the Table of life today, and let Christ heal and strengthen you  
Because your journey is not yet over.

Amen.