

23 April 2023  
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“A Firm Foundation”

Text: Luke 24:13-35; Acts 2:14a, 36-41

**Alleluia! Christ is Risen!** [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of the things I really appreciate about the Scriptures is their honesty - the people in these pages aren't superheroes! They're just like us. They fail and sin. They get confused. They are slow to learn. They mourn. They get all tied up in knots. Think of all the people in the Bible who don't get it, who sin and fail, and often times spectacularly! And not minor figures, either. The main guys.

So it was with those two disciples as they left Jerusalem after the Passover - a Passover unlike any other! - and made their way back to the village of Emmaus. They weren't celebrating Jesus' victory. They didn't have it all figured out. They weren't paragons of great faith. They were sad and dejected, just as we would have been. Just as we often *are*.

And we see the mercy of Jesus - mercy that He showed all through His life, that He showed especially on the cross, but which He continues to show here, to these two disciples. Just two. Which is the way of it with Jesus, isn't it? Talking with Nicodemus by himself (John 3), to a Samaritan woman by herself (John 4), searching out the man born blind after restoring his sight (John 9). Jesus doesn't care just how big the crowds, like when He fed the 5,000. *Where even two or three are gathered . . .* (Matthew 18:20)

So Jesus comes to these two. He doesn't expect them to figure it out on their own. They can't. We can't. *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him . . .* we confess that in the Creed according to the Catechism. We need to be taught. We need to be straightened out.

This is the problem we are born with. In the beginning, God created everything good and perfect and straight. But sin has us twisted up in knots. Satan cannot create anything - only God can do that. But he *can* twist and pervert what God has made good and straight. And he has. So in the First Reading today, from the book of Acts, we heard Peter say to the people in Jerusalem, 50 days after Jesus came to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus: ***Save yourselves from this crooked generation.*** And crooked is a good word, a word that describes every generation. It's what sin has done to us. Bent us, curved us, curved us in on ourselves. So it's no longer God first but ME first. No longer my

neighbor first but ME first. Think about what our world is all about today . . . what I want, what I feel, what I need, what I think, what I want to be true, what makes ME happy, what I deserve, what I have coming, what's good for ME. Sound like what we see in our world today? And what, perhaps, you often see in yourself?

So what does Jesus do with these two men? He straightens them out. Note what they said, how they were curved in on themselves and so confused and jumbled and tied up in knots. WE had hoped. WE thought. But what they thought was wrong. Just as what we think is often wrong. So Jesus straightens them out, bends them back out, and directs them away from themselves and what they hoped and thought, and to the truth. To the Word of God. To what the Scriptures, the Old Testament, said. *Here's* the foundation. *Here's* the truth. ***And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.***

And their hearts are burning, their eyes are opening. They are believing in a new way, seeing in a new way. They are being straightened out until, finally, it all comes together at the Table. All their catechesis "clicks" and they see Jesus ***in the breaking of the bread.*** And then they stop going the *wrong* way, back to Emmaus, back in sorrow, sadness, and mourning, and they turn around and start going the *right* way, back to Jerusalem, back to the other disciples, back in gladness and joy. No longer tied up in knots of confusion and guilt and dashed hopes, but straightened out and set free in forgiveness and faith. Focused on Jesus, not themselves. Focused on what He did, not what they have done. Focused on life, not death.

Which is the same thing Peter did 50 days later on the day of Pentecost when he preached to the crowds in Jerusalem that day. Peter who, himself, needed straightening out a time or two. And was, by Jesus. It's a shame we didn't hear those twenty-two verses in Acts skipped over in the reading today (we'll hear them once we get to Pentecost ourselves). For in those verses Peter is doing what Jesus did and using the Old Testament to straighten the people out and point them away from themselves and to Jesus. To Jesus once crucified, dead, and buried, but now risen from the dead.

So when they ask, ***what shall we do?*** Peter *doesn't* point them back inside themselves, back to their hearts or faith, back to the confusion and twisted knots inside them - that's not the answer! Instead, he points them to where the living Jesus - and His word and promises and forgiveness and life and salvation - is for them now: ***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.*** Here is your foundation. Here is the truth. Here is Jesus *for you*. And that day, as we heard, about three thousand stopped going the wrong way, their own way, their own crooked and twisted and sinful way, and were turned to the right way, the straight way, the way of gladness, joy, and hope. In Jesus.

And so it is for you and me today. For you and me who go the wrong way, who get twisted up in knots, who are often confused and dismayed, who sin and fail (often times

spectacularly!), and who are curved in on ourselves. For us who need straightening out. Who need to hear: it's not all about what you want, what you feel, what you need, what you think, what you want to be true, what make you happy, what you think you deserve, what you think you have coming, what you think is good for you. That's not what life is all about! That's kind of blasphemous to say in our world today. But it needs to be said. So that we begin to think differently, rightly, biblically.

Which is really as big a change in thinking as the Copernican Revolution was in the 16th century. Now, what was that? Maybe some of you remember learning about Copernicus in school. Before his time, it was thought that the earth was the center of the universe and everything revolved around . . . well, *us!* Copernicus, though, changed that thinking to the sun being the center and everything revolving around it. And it's that kind of change in thinking that we need - that everything doesn't revolve around ME. That's it's not all about what I want and think. **Everything really revolves around the Son - the Son of God.** He is the source of life and all that is needed for life. My life now and my life eternally.

So we come here every week, after another week of going the wrong way, of being confused, of being crooked and tied up in knots . . . and we're pointed not to what we can do, or should do, or have to do, because what we can do and do do is the problem! Instead, we're pointed to Jesus and what He has done *for us* - His death and resurrection for us. His forgiveness for you, His washing for you, His teaching for you, His feeding for you. And with all these He straightens us back out, He unties the knots we have twisted ourselves in and cannot undo, and He sets us back on the foundation of His Word and truth. That we be no longer in sorrow, sadness, and mourning, but joy and gladness in being His children and living in His victory.

So like the people Peter preached to in Jerusalem, we are pointed to **baptism** as the source of our life and hope. How do I know I have life and hope? Not because of anything in me! But because I am baptized! Because Jesus made me His own. There I have His Word and promise.

And like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we see and receive Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Here He gives Himself to me, and with Him comes His forgiveness, life, and salvation. How do I know? Again, not because of anything in me! Not because I am somehow worthy - cuz' I'm not! But because Jesus put His Word and promise here with His Body and Blood.

And like the people in Jerusalem who heard Peter's preaching and like those two disciples who heard Jesus' teaching, we hear that same word today, here. We're not left to figure it out on our own - we can't. So Jesus, in His mercy, gives us churches and pastors and preaching and teaching to give us a foundation and that we know the truth. To constantly point us away from ourselves and to Jesus. To Jesus promised, to Jesus incarnate, to Jesus the fulfiller, and to Jesus the victorious one. Which is to say, Jesus *for*

*you.*

And then like those two disciples, we go back out - not as superheroes or super-believers - but just as regular people. But regular people who have been with Jesus, who have been given Jesus, and so different. And to live like it, act like it, speak like it, love like it. Like we've been re-oriented, straightened out, unknotted, able to see rightly again. Because we have. That's it's not all about ME, it's all about Jesus *for* me. And that's better. A *lot* better!

For how much is Jesus for you? Peter used the word *ransom* today. A ransom is a payment that is made to buy someone back, and the more valuable and precious and important they are, the higher the ransom. So this is what Peter said: *you - **you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers** - from the self-centered, curved-in-upon-ourselves sin we inherited - you were ransomed **not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.*** You see, you are so important, so valuable, so precious to God, that the very life and blood of Jesus were given as the ransom for you. Which makes you more valuable and precious than you can imagine. That's how much God loves you. That's how much God wants you. That's how much God is willing to give for you.

That's what those two disciples on the road to Emmaus needed to learn. That Jesus' death on the cross was no out-of-control tragedy, but exactly according to plan, according to Moses and all the prophets, to give them life. For that's how this story ended - not with death, but with life. Not with burial, but with resurrection. That's our foundation, that's our hope. Nothing in us, but all Jesus and what He has done for us. The foundation that **Christ is risen!** [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] So that no matter what is happening in the world or in our lives, we need not walk in sorrow. **Jesus is risen.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.