

The Third Sunday of Easter
St. Luke 24:13-35

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

That we may obtain this faith [by which is received justification], the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. (AC V, Triglotta)

Also [our churches] teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. (AC VII, Triglotta)

Although the Church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the saying of Christ: The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, etc. Matt. 23, 2. Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men. (AC VIII, Triglotta)

These are three articles from the Augsburg Confession—specifically, the fifth, seventh, and eighth. Do you not also find it amazing that the Confession—indeed, the entire Book of Concord—teaches the Scriptures so faithfully and beautifully. After all of these years—over two decades in the ministry—having studied the Book so much, gone through it so many times, I am still amazed how “in agreement” it is with the Scriptures. The church of the Lutheran Reformation really did get it right.

So, the Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses what is called the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar—that is, that Christ gives His body and blood with the bread and wine in Holy Communion. So, when you receive the Lord's Supper, you receive both body and bread to eat and both blood and wine to drink. This is what is taught in the Lutheran Confessions...

...And the Scriptures. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation [or communion] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation [or communion] in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16) Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the cup—and by that he was referring to the contents, the wine—is a participation or communion in the blood of Christ; the bread, likewise, is a participation or communion in the body of Christ. Inspired by God to write of the Lord's Supper in terms that we would say is Real Presence. Christ's blood is really present in the wine, and His body is really present in the bread.

Therefore, Philip Melancthon wrote in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, “[i]t would follow, if the Lord's body were not truly present, that the bread is not a communion of the body, but only of the spirit of Christ.” The same can be said, then of the cup: if the Lord's blood were not truly present, that the wine is not a communion of the bloody, but only the spirit of Christ. Not that the spirit of Christ wouldn't be enough, but that's not what God taught through the pen of St. Paul. This is what it means to call the Lord's Supper Holy Communion, that there is a communion between body with bread and blood with wine. However, there are Christians out there who subscribe only to a spiritual presence when they take Communion.

That said, today's Gospel lesson also serves as proof of another key doctrine of Lutheranism: God does His work to you and in you through His instituted means, which in short are referred to as Word and Sacrament. You have just heard three articles of the Augsburg Confession which clearly articulate this teaching, so now to examine today's Gospel.

Two of Jesus' followers were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus in the late afternoon on the day of the Resurrection. They were recounting the events of the week, and especially that day; how things went from joyous and triumphant to a grisly death and burial. There were reports of a resurrection—angels and an empty grave—but not a word of where Jesus was; not a word of having seen Jesus except from a hysterical Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. It all seemed so unbelievable to them, that had someone else told them that they had seen Jesus, their response might have been similar to that of Thomas as you heard last week:

"We won't believe unless we see Jesus." They had, after all, lost hope, as they said, "[W]e had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

It is into the middle of this conversation that Jesus joined them. However, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." You must note here that these two were not simply blinded by sin that they were unable to recognize Jesus. Like Mary Magdalene in the garden of the tomb (John 20:11-18), they were prevented from recognizing Him at first; Jesus was concealing His identity from them.

"What are you talking about?" this third man asked the two disciples. You might well imagine the bewildered look on the two disciples' faces: "This man is walking from Jerusalem and doesn't know what we're talking about? Where has he been? What cave has he been hiding in?" Cleopas spoke up: "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" He asked.

Now, this must almost seem sadistic, but think about it this way: How often have any of you thought that you'd like to be a fly on the wall, to hear what others say about you when you're not there. Here's Jesus doing that very thing; He's hearing from these two exactly what they believe about Him:

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.

"But him they did not see." That's the dagger in the heart of hope for these two.

That's when this "clueless" man started teaching them: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" It is as if He asked them, "Didn't Jesus say this was going to happen?" Then, beginning with Moses and the Prophets, He expounded to them all that was written about Him, still not revealing who He really was to them.

And as He spoke to them, their hearts burned within them. It was all making sense. Connections were being made between what had been written and what had happened over the past week, and especially that day, two days after Jesus' death and burial—the third day. It is as St. Paul wrote, "Faith comes by hearing." (cf. Romans 10:17) In the hearing of the Word of God, as Jesus expounded it for them, faith in Christ was produced and renewed and strengthened.

At that point, they still didn't recognize that it was Jesus walking with them and teaching them, but they believed in Him on account of the Word. Faith is still created, renewed, and strengthened the same way: by hearing the Word of God, the Holy Spirit working through this means. That is, Jesus still comes and walks among His people, not recognized or even recognizable in His person, but as His Word is faithfully expounded, giving the Holy Spirit who works faith when and where God pleases in those who hear the Gospel, as Article V of the Augsburg Confession states.

The daylight was almost gone, and Jesus, still incognito, insisted that He had further to travel. "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." Jesus obliged. He went into their house and shared a meal with them. How did He do it? It seems that He took it over, becoming host at the meal; for He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to those around Him to eat. At that very moment, the two disciples who had their eyes restrained, as it could be translated, have them opened, and recognized Jesus, and at that instant, He disappeared from their view. Him they no longer saw.

Things were then different with those two. No longer were their hopes dashed. They had faith. They didn't need to see Jesus for they now knew where to look for Him: in His Word and Sacrament. They heard Him in His Word and saw Him revealed, with eyes of faith, in the Sacrament. And so it has been done for

centuries since then. As already proclaimed, the church of the Lutheran Reformation really did get it right—Word and Sacrament.

From there, armed with Word and Sacrament, the two disciples returned to Jerusalem. It didn't matter that the daylight was gone or nearly gone. They had to return to the disciples and talk to them. By that time, the ten were locked in the upper room and see Jesus themselves. When the two get back to Jerusalem, it's possible that the eleven might have been reunited and telling Thomas, "We have seen the Lord," and others are with them. And they recounted everything that had happened to them. The Word of God has some amazing effects on the heart made faithful.

It wasn't some cruel game that Jesus was playing on these two followers. He was teaching them that they didn't need to see Jesus as Thomas wanted to (and a week later would), for following His ascension, no one would see Him again until His return to earth in order to judge it. But, as He has promised, He would be with them and all who believe in Him always, to the very end of the age (cf. Matthew 28:20), speaking to the faithful (and giving faith) in His Word and revealing Himself in the Sacrament.

Still, many Christians don't get it. They are like the two disciples as they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. For instance, there was a certain LCMS congregation in a certain city in a certain state where the certain former pastor loved to use a particular song in his created service in place of the *Agnus Dei*. These all shall remain nameless, except the song, whose words are: "Open our eyes Lord / We want to see Jesus, / To reach out and touch Him / And say that we love Him." While it is certainly salutary to ask of God for a right faith in order to hear Jesus in His Word and to see Him in His Sacrament, and to pray for the return of Christ, the words of this song express a faulty understanding of today's text—yet a sentiment held by many in Christendom.

These still seek a Jesus-experience as Thomas wanted. These still have hearts like the two disciples as they walked to Emmaus—hopes dashed because Jesus was not seen, as reliably as they would have liked, at that moment following His resurrection. These, to put it quite bluntly, refuse to hear Christ in His Word, where He walks with His people in lives assaulted by the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. And many of these refuse to recognize the Savior in His Supper, where He feeds with His own body and blood. Instead, many look for visions in toast, cheese curls, reflections in windows, and the shape of the clouds. Wouldn't it be amazing to see Jesus, now, with your own eyes of flesh, before He comes again and reveals Himself to all flesh as He has promised to do? It seems that's what many of those like these want.

Despite what people like these want, they need to hear the constant preaching of the Gospel. For, as has been mentioned, faith comes by hearing, and "through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel." This is what Jesus gave the two followers on the way to Emmaus, revealing Himself to them through Word and Sacrament. Jesus does the same to you when doubts have their way with you, coming to you through Word and Sacrament to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. "Go, and do likewise..." (cf. Luke 10:37)

So, dear Baptized, you have been gathered here by the Holy Spirit, who was given to you in Word and Sacrament. You have been beaten and bloodied by the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh, and so you are gathered here by grace and mercy to receive your Lord who comes to you in His Word and body and blood hidden in bread and wine. These you believe and receive by God-given faith. These are effective for the simple reason that they are the very means that Jesus used as He walked and spoke in His own flesh and blood to His disciples, as He instituted and commanded—His word which endures forever (cf. Matthew 24:35, 1 Peter 1:25), and He did say, "Take and eat, this is My body...Take and drink, this is My blood."

This is the truth confessed in the Lutheran Confessions and taught in the Scriptures: wherever two or more are gathered in Christ's name, where the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered, there is Christ present. And you can rejoice like the two followers on the way to Emmaus, that the same thing that happened to them happens here, God help me: The Scriptures concerning Jesus are interpreted to you, and as that happens, and His Sacrament is given to you, He is truly present with you here and now to give you His life and salvation and the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.