Text: Luke 24:13-35

**Introduction**

Most of the Resurrection stories in the gospels are about the apostles and the Mary’s. The Canonical order – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – is an interesting compare. Matthew really just includes the Mary’s story of the empty tomb, the angel and running to tell the disciples. Mark, in the oldest ending is even shorter. It’s the Mary’s and the Angel, but nothing about what they then did. The extended ending that is in most of our bibles cribs from both Matthew and Luke. Mary Magdalene goes and tells, but it also in two quick verses summarizes our gospel today. John has more extensive resurrection appearances, but the are all various configurations of the disciples and the Mary’s. The purpose of John’s accounts appears to be to answer a couple of questions. Why do the resurrection appearances not continue? Turn to Thomas. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. There is a bit of that in our text today, more in a bit. What about Peter and his denial? Jesus tells him to three times to “feed my sheep.” And like that gospel in some other places, some events just don’t get recorded, but their impact is in a different story. John doesn’t have an institution of the Lord’s Supper, but he does have the bread of life discourse in John 6, peace be to Luther who didn’t seen that as eucharistic. John also doesn’t have an Ascension with the great commission. But Jesus does breathe the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and tells Peter to “feed his lambs” and concludes with a personal witness of sorts.

**Text**

That makes Luke’s story of the Road to Emmaus unique. A resurrection appearance to those outside the 12 and the Mary’s. Eusebius, the early church historian, says that these two – Cleopas and an unnamed man – are father and son and part of the 70 that we sent out. That makes some literary sense as Luke is the only gospel writer to include the sending of the 70, it would make some sense that he’d include a resurrection appearance to representatives. But Eusebius’ story isn’t scripture. It belongs to the category of things called tradition. And what tradition usually seems to do is answer common journalistic questions with plausible answers.

What scripture tells us is that two men – one named Cleopas – were walking to Emmaus and discussing “these things that had happened.” And where two are gathered, a third man comes and joins them. “But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” Reading the story we know that this is Jesus. This is a fulfillment of that promise wherever two gather in the name there I am, but with these two there is a lack of recognition of that. That is one of the big questions, how are we to recognize the risen Christ in our midst? What is required?

And Jesus walking with them takes these two into creed and catechism mode. What are you talking about? Are you the only one who doesn’t know what has happened in these days? What things? Recite them. Reiterate them. Tell it again. And they tell Jesus the story. They mentally know the story. “Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word.” But whatever faith these two may have had because of those deeds and words had not survived the cross. “Our chief priests and rulers delivered him up…and crucified him.” “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” They even knew the testimony of the resurrection. The story of the Mary’s and Peter and John. “Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said.”

**Christology**

What is required to recognize the risen Christ? The first answer given in faith. These two at this point don’t have it. As Jesus says to them, “You silly boys, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets did speak.” One of the few places our translators I think choose too harsh a term, fool. How Jesus uses it hear is more a term of endearment. They have the risen Christ, the very one they know so much about walking with them, and they don’t see.

So how do we come about this faith to see? Jesus, up until this point has let the two men do the talking, but now he takes over the conversation. The core of what he says is in his rhetorical question, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” The cross defeated your faith, but you should know better. That cross is the cornerstone of your faith. It was necessary. The thief saw it as he asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom. The prophets saw it. Moses saw. “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Jesus shared the Word with them. How do we come about faith to see? Faith comes by hearing.

But they still did not recognize Jesus in their midst? How are we – wherever two or more are gathered – to recognize Christ? Well they drew near their destination, and Jesus acted like he was going to go on. So Cleopas and the unnamed insist that he can do no such thing. “Stay with us, it’s already getting dark.” So Jesus stayed. And it was at the table, when he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them, that their eyes were opened. Here is where they recognized Jesus in the their midst. And it remains this way to this very day. In the Sacrament we have Jesus in our midst. The resurrected Lord is here with us.

It is one of those burning questions that sometimes get asked: why did the resurrection appearances stop? The very first answer is that they have not. Christ appears to us in bread and wine. That is an answer of faith and hope. This is where we are to find Jesus. These two disciples start out the road to Emmaus faithless and hopeless, and through the Word and Sacrament have been strengthened in faith and had their hope renewed. “He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

**Moral**

But let’s also give a second answer. The second they recognize him, “he vanished from their sight.” If I was preaching from John I’d reach for the passage where Jesus attempts to tell the disciples it is good that he is going so that the Holy Spirit will be sent. Because it is not by knowledge that we are saved, but by faith. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word and the Sacraments to enliven that faith. But Luke has his own way of saying this. Luke’s has Jesus saying, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already here.” And lots of preachers in lots of ages have build eschatological castles out of that verse. But what is that fire? “Did not our hearts burn with us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” Christ is absent in the body so that your faith might be built up by the Spirit. Christ is absent in the body, so that the fire he set upon the earth – hearts burning with the Spirit – might kindle and grow.

And part of that growth is what these two immediately do. They find the eleven – the apostles – and gather together and testify “The Lord is risen indeed.” They don’t exclude themselves. They don’t just go on their way. They recognize that they need each other’s testimony. They recognize that the risen Christ is indeed with them in the gathering and the breaking of the bread.

**Eschatological**

So, I want to end with one last thought. Jesus warns us that in the final days many will come saying “I am he.” Now we normally think of this in a very literal way. Someone actually claiming to be the messiah or a new prophet. Muhammed or Joseph Smith might be examples. But I think the warning is something the in our day is in each heart. I’ve heard more than once a phrase like “well, the Jesus I know wouldn’t say or do that.” And the that being referred to is what I’d simply call a pet sin I don’t want to give up.

Scholars have since the late 18th century been on various “Quests for the Historical Jesus.” The most recent one that you might vaguely remember was a group calling themselves The Jesus Seminar. They ended up voting on passages of the gospels with colored marbles. Red for sure sayings and events. Black for it didn’t happen. And various other shades. The real result of all these quests from different times, that Jesus seminar not excluded, is the creation of a Jesus in our own image. A Jesus that says and does the things we wish a messiah would do. Usually the things we’d say and do if we were the messiah. Many will come saying I am he.

Don’t believe them.

How are we to recognize Christ? Not the Christ that we’d make up if we were enthroned, but the Jesus that is. The way Jesus taught us. “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” As more and more people appear saying I am he, it should drive us back to the Scriptures as our sole norm. As even we ourselves might desire the Christ of our own making, we need the gathering centered on the breaking of the bread.

Our hearts make up lots of Christs and Lords. But the Christ who is has kindled a fire that tells us. Keep enough oil with you to watch.