

Easter 3A April 26 2020
Luke 24:13-35
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in perfect unity, now and forever. Amen. *While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him... Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him.* Let's pray: Dear Jesus, we thank you that you reveal your resurrected self to us today through Word and Spirit, that we too may be glad, and worship you all the days of our lives. Fill our hearts now with joy as you speak to us as though you are standing right in front of us. Amen.

“While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him”.

Jesus is often present with us, yet, we are rarely conscious of it. We may feel the effect of his visitation, but not acknowledge him as the visitor. And we are forgiven, for we stand in esteemed company. Think of Abraham in his tent by the oaks of Mamre, who thought he was extending hospitality to three travellers, and in so doing he unknowingly entertained the LORD (Genesis 18). When Jacob wrestled with a mysterious man at the Jabbok, he didn't recognise him asking, “What is your name?” Only later was it revealed that Jacob had “striven with God” (Genesis 32). The same is true of Joshua. Once when near Jericho, Joshua saw a man standing with his sword drawn in his hand, and he challenged him, questioning whether he was friend or foe. Joshua didn't recognise the man until he said, “Neither; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come... Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy” (Joshua 5). Jesus blesses us regularly with his presence, and yet, for one reason or another, we aren't aware he is with us.

Dear Friends, there is no sorrow worse for a Christian than feeling separated from Jesus. There is nothing worse than first having tasted the love that is better than wine, to find oneself in such a state, that the heart feels only able to cry, “Lord, where are you? Why aren’t you near?” or to ask someone, “Have you seen him whom my soul loves?” Two things obscure the Lord’s presence from our awareness.

First, our unbelief can hide the Lord from our eyes. It’s not by physical seeing that we will know Jesus’ presence; it’s by faith. We must dive into the mysteries of his heart, to understand the depth of his love. We must search the scriptures which tell us that he delights in us, that he loves his own to the end and continues to do so, that he doesn’t conceal himself from his beloved. We will discover Jesus’ by believing and expecting that he will come and meet with us as he promises: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, **I am there** among them” (Matthew 18:20).

Oh, for more faith! Oh, for more love! Faith and love work together. Faith is like the eye of an eagle; it sees things that others can’t. Love is like the eye of a dove; gentle, pure, without spot. Doves don’t have peripheral vision. They see only what’s in front of them. They pair for life and they keep their eyes on each other; they go everywhere together.

Together, faith and love are the eyes of the Lord. Although unbelief hides the Lord from our eyes, we are not hidden from his. I assure you, Beloved Saints, that Jesus loves us. He sees us from heaven. He looks at us with an infinitely pure flame of love in his heart that is known by the look in his eyes! His most lovely eyes are fixed and focus on us, the object of his affection! Jesus bled and died for us, so that he could be with us more powerfully than ever before.

Beloved, the scales of unbelief often blind us to Jesus' presence, and it's wonderful when the Holy Spirit redirects our gaze to the scriptures, enabling us to see Jesus Christ as he truly is, a radiant lily in the meadow of the Word of God, glistening like a precious treasure. Jesus may be with us, but we don't see him because of something in ourselves.

On the other hand, we may not be aware of Jesus' presence because of Jesus himself. Jesus came down from heaven to live and experience life just as we do. There is nothing about our lives that Jesus can't sympathise with. And it's true that we often see Jesus best in certain characteristics when we ourselves adopt those characteristics.

You might be a beginner in grace, and Jesus appears to you with a smile on his face - a gentle Shepherd leading his lambs. Then, he may seem to disappear for a while and you feel that he has rebuked you. You conclude that this cannot be Christ. Christ is always a feeder of lambs. And so he is, but remember that he also comes with a whip to chase out buyers and sellers from his temple. He is the same Christ, only you haven't seen him before in that character.

Perhaps you only see Jesus as your joy and consolation, but remember he is also a refiner; "See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity" (Isaiah 48:10). When you are in the furnace, suffering affliction, trial, and depression of spirit, the refiner is Christ, the same loving Christ in another character.

You may see Christ breaking bread, and giving you the water of life, but you must also learn that his fan is in his hand to purge the floor of your heart. He's not another Christ; rather, he exercises another attribute of his holiness.

Initially, we come to know Jesus as our *prophet*, leading us into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But we must also learn that he is our *priest* who cleanses us from sin, and furthermore, as our *King* who conquers us by the sacred arms of love.

We first give little children milk that is easily digested. Then we introduce hard crusts with which they cut wisdom teeth. Finally, we give them meat to chew on. Jesus is always our food whether he comes as milk or as meat, yet he won't remain milk lest we remain babes. He becomes meat to exercise our senses, through which we grow to understand the deeper truths of the kingdom of God. Don't be alarmed, beloved, for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever," and though he changes the form under which he manifests himself, he is always undisputedly, the Lord of love.

"Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him".

What joy is unleashed when we discover that Jesus has been with us all along in our hearts. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" We only get heavenly heartburn from the presence of Jesus. A flame kindled by his grace. Even if you don't feel summer in your soul, the ice is melting, the buds are beginning to swell, the sun is rising, and you are beginning to feel his glow. The Lord is not far from you, and one day you will look back and say, "He was with me all along."

Perhaps you're feeling there were better days when you walked closely with Jesus, but now you've lost your way. You cry your eyes out, wishing you could return to walking with God, abiding in Christ. Your desire is so passionate that it makes your heart ache. Is Jesus really so far away? Who do you think makes your heart burn with such desire?

Or you might feel in your soul that you love Jesus, yet you feel you have no fellowship with him. Then you hear the name of Jesus praised and adored, and your heart dances to the sweetest music under heaven. Tears well up in your eyes when you are reminded of his true love for sinners and your heart burns as your lips mouth the words, "glory be to his name." Is Jesus really that far from you?

Maybe you feel your heart burning for the conversion of unbelievers! Your heart cries, "I wish a flood of revival would sweep across the world bringing a great harvest to Jesus, and his crown be set upon billions of human hearts!" Your heart longs for Jesus to be glorified among people, and yet you think, "Where's the flood? Where's Jesus?" Doesn't your heart burn within you? He must be near.

Saints, I assure you that the magnet is not far away when the needle moves thus. When your eyes are opened you will recognise Jesus and realise he has always been with you.

I pray that we may always have Jesus with us. May he lead us from strength to strength, and glorify himself in us. If any of you deeply desire Jesus but struggle to feel his presence, remember that your desire for him indicates how near he is to you. Christ is always nearby. He is close at hand to every seeking soul. Seek the LORD while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Trust him and he is yours. No matter what happens, Jesus is closer to you than your next breath. May Jesus abide with you, and you with him. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.