

Sermon Text for March 27, 2016 – Easter Sunday

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Joshua 1:1-9, Luke 24:28-35
“Keeping the Promises”

Easter is all about Jesus revealing himself to us. He does it in surprising ways. Jesus was revealed to us yesterday with over 100 kids in Fellowship Hall celebrating Easter with an egg hunt. It has to be one of my favorite events that this church does. Jesus was revealed on Maundy Thursday as a small intimate group of us took communion together and then an even smaller group washed each other's feet. There was no denying that Jesus was present. In those situations you know Jesus is present, you feel him there. There are also times in our lives when we don't feel the presence of Jesus. We wonder if God has kept his promises, the promises he made to Joshua that he would be by his side at all times.

Today this Easter, we have a chance to see Jesus revealed in Luke as he sits at the dinner table with his disciples. Just like in Palm Sunday we had a bit of a different Palm Sunday with verses from Revelation. So, in the same way today for Easter we don't have one of the four Gospel writers telling us about the empty tomb, instead we have the historian Luke, who tells us of this journey that these two disciples took and wouldn't you know, without them knowing it, Jesus appears in their midst.

Today we will learn how to see and experience the risen Christ in our midst. Let's look at our second Scripture today, the disciples on the road to Emmaus grasp God's revelation to them and learn how to embrace the future, even if it is uncertain and risky, and somehow exhilarating that God puts out before them. But the only way that they are able to see that future is by standing on God's promise that he will never leave them or forsake them. Let's read.

Our first reading in Joshua took place right after Moses had died and Joshua was given the helm of the people of Israel. When we went with this church we were standing on the shore of the Jordan River. We stood in what was supposed to be the exact spot where God tells Joshua to cross with the priests going first carrying the ark and then the Israelite people. It was their entry into the promised land. We were on the Israeli side and the river served as a literal border between Israel and Jordan. You may not know much about the current geopolitical realities between these two nations but lets just say that Israel and Arab states haven't historically gotten along very well.

It was powerful to think that it could have been right in that spot where this first Scripture took place where God took young Joshua aside and said: Be strong and courageous, as I was with Moses, and Joseph, and Isaac, and Abraham so I shall be with you.

But the reality was that Joshua is a new leader following Moses who was an absolute legend, he was someone as people say who had very, very big shoes to fill. Some were thinking that the nation needed Moses and were pining for those days when Moses was still around. Now, they give Joshua all the assurances he could

need when they tell him later in this chapter, just as we were with Moses, so we will be with you. Well, what we find in Scripture is this common thread that the Old Testament is not about Moses or any one person but rather a testimony of God raising up one person after another to carry out the promises he made to his people.

That is the cliff notes of this Scripture. No one is indispensable and irreplaceable as long as God is in the mix, for what does Paul say I am convinced that all things work for good for (one individual or one family? NO,) those who have trusted in the Lord. Even 40 years in the wilderness worked for good? If we are able to stand on the promises of God, which this Scripture and many others like it remind us of God's unfailing love do, then yes, absolutely, we can be certain that the future here, and that our future as individual disciples of Jesus Christ absolutely will work for good because we do stand and trust in the Lord.

A week ago Wednesday the Session had its yearly opportunity to examine the confirmation kids. I need to tell you that this was the most unique examination that I have ever been a part of in my 22 years of ministry. Normally there is an awkwardness and some questions of content come up. Not this year. The young women who were examined were asked and felt very comfortable sharing personal details of their faith journey and one theme continued throughout. This church has helped them recognize that no matter what they go through in life, Jesus is always by their side. They shared times when they felt abandoned, alone, and wondered where Jesus was present. This church helped them face the future because the promises of Scripture came alive to them. When they left one elder after another said: this church is in good hands. The future generations have risen up.

A community in transition, a family in transition, a world in transition, an individual in transition will always be able to make it through that transition and thrive in the future as long as they trust in the promises that God gives to them and don't try to second guess God or those whom God has placed in their lives to reveal God's purposes to them.

It was this point that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus missed before Jesus appears to them. Before these verses today what happens in this Scripture is that Jesus has been raised from the dead but no one believes it. And so two disciples make their way towards Emmaus complaining about their state of missing the Christ to this stranger who joins them on the journey. This stranger happens to be Jesus and he tries his best to wake them up and say listen, it's me. He quotes from memory Scripture and goes from Genesis to Malachi explaining how he is the Messiah but it seems these two just don't get it. They've enjoyed the company and the conversation with Jesus so as Jesus pretends to go on they ask him to stay with them and have a meal. That's the least they could offer him as a guest. Jesus accepts the offer but then something strange happens.

Jesus instead of being the invited guest, all of a sudden we find him becoming the host. This is where you need your Bible with you to check it out. Jesus is the one who takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. These 4 actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing is what happens at all sacramental meals, every time we take part in the Lord's Supper we do just that. Now this is key. By inviting Christ into their home these disciples have allowed Christ to take over the role of host, or Lord of their lives.

This very simple act of hospitality, inviting a befriended stranger over to eat becomes here in Luke a sacramental act as Christ's presence transforms a meal into a very spiritual encounter with the risen Jesus.

They had been with the risen Christ since before Jerusalem. Christ had been preparing them, grooming them for their sacramental meal and now, only as he celebrates this Lord's supper are their eyes truly opened. They had seen the Christ, but hadn't truly understood that he was there in their midst. In the breaking of the bread they were able to see with eyes of faith, and what a difference it made.

Do you notice to whom Christ reveals himself after he is raised from the dead. He doesn't go to perfect strangers. He doesn't go to those who aren't prepared or even open or receptive to his coming but rather he appears to two who were already thinking about him, two who had the chance to prepare with Scripture and verses of fulfillment so that they would be ready. Once they are ready for him, then he is revealed to them.

We find the same happening in the Gospel of John, only those who are able to stand on the promises that God has given them, only those who are aware of the promises are able to see Jesus and are revealed to him. Mary Magdalene sees Jesus, thinks he is the gardener, carries on a conversation with him but it isn't until he states Mary, looks at her and addresses her directly that she is able to see, to truly see with eyes of faith.

The disciples began this journey on the road to Emmaus sad and dejected, but then we read at the end of this Scripture that once Christ is revealed to them their hearts were burning within them and they hastily and hopefully go back on the path. This time they take the path with good news and full of the Easter Message.

At the end of a long week you may drag yourselves into this church like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, sad and dejected, not really searching and looking for the Christ. But my goal and all of our goal is that Christ will be revealed to you, if for the first time then Halleluja! Then once you go out of this church and get back on the path then look at your life and you will find that it is completely different, with joy and thanksgiving because the risen Christ has been revealed to you.

Today we have something for you, and it is something you can keep, or something you can hand to someone that you think may want to have the presence of Jesus in their lives. In order to remind ourselves that Jesus is present at all times, even in places and times when we least expect it, this is what we are going to do. Take out the business card that is in your bulletin. If you have already downloaded the app Augment, for those of you who have a phone older than 10 years this may not be for you. But you never know when Jesus is going to show up like he did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. To remind ourselves of that we have given each of you something that will never go away. With the app you can scan this wonderful country lane, one that maybe the disciples took, and who do you see? Jesus is there accompanying you.

The disciples have their eyes opened to understand who God is when in communion with God and with each other. Don't miss that part of it. God is revealed most powerfully when we work together and reach out to God. But it is easy to miss God's promises when we live in the midst of a world that tells us that God is dead when he allows the type of destruction that we see in Brussels, in a world that tells the future is only the one that

you create. But we don't have to listen to the world because we stand on the promises of God that tell us to be Easter people.

Expect God to reveal himself to you and he will. Expect God to knock Jericho down with a shout, and he will. Expect God to take your desperate situation and transform it and God will because God knows you haven't been able to. That is what Emmaus is all about, God revealing to us in the most unexpected way that God still can and will.

I pray that all of our eyes will be opened this Sunday so that today we will make a decision to here on out trust in the promises on God that are not built on any of us individually, but that God chooses to manifest by living out in us as a community. Amen.