**THE HIDDEN SAVIOR**

**The Third Sunday of Easter**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Springfield, Missouri**

**12 April *Anno Domini* 2020**

**On Easter morning, as the sun came up, the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth was discovered opened and empty. His corpse was missing. The angels God sent from heaven found an empty tomb. The Temple police guard posted at the tomb felt the earth shake beneath them when the sealed stone door of the cave-tomb was supernaturally rolled to expose its vacancy; together they were paralyzed by a fear they never imagined, much less experienced before. And then Jesus, resurrected in His Body, appeared alive to Mary Magdalene, to the other women in His company who had come to anoint His corpse, to a disciple named Cleopas and his un-named traveling companion on the road to Emmaus, to Peter in Jerusalem at a time not specifically given, and to ten of the eleven apostles along with other followers of Jesus who had assembled that evening. Jesus’ sixth resurrection appearance came a week later on the Second Sunday of Easter, as the believers were again assembled in Jerusalem, this time with Thomas among them.**

**Between last Sunday and Jesus’ Ascension into heaven on the fortieth day after Easter, He made five more recorded resurrection appearances to His followers.**

**The only one marked by a specific day or time is the final one, when He returned to heaven. On this Third Sunday of Easter our appointed Gospel reading from Luke chapter twenty-four takes us back to Easter Sunday, so that we can spend more time and look more deeply into the third resurrection appearance. We will read again the beginning words from Luke’s account:**

***That very day two of*** [the followers of Jesus] ***were going to a village named***

***Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with***

***each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking***

***and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But***

***their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.***

**This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.**

**One of the disciples is a man named Cleopas, the other remains un-named. Understand that’s all the Bible says about them, other than they were part of the inner core group of Jesus supporters. Now they are headed home to the village of Emmaus, a small town about seven miles from Jerusalem. It doesn’t matter, but there is credible testimony in some of the writings of early Church leaders of the second and third centuries that this Cleopas (a Greek name) was the Clopas (that’s the Hebrew version of the name) of John 19:25 where the four women named standing at the foot of Jesus’ cross included a *Miriam (Mary), the wife of Clopas*.**

**Clopas is also identified as the brother of Joseph, Jesus’ adoptive father, and the man walking with him was his son Simeon, who after A.D. 70 succeeded Jesus’**

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**brother James as leader of the Jerusalem congregation. That would make these two hikers of Emmaus the Uncle and cousin of Jesus. Again, this is not in the Bible, so we can’t say for sure. It doesn’t matter. But since it is possible and reasonable, and it adds to the drama, I’m going to go with it in this one sermon.**

**As they traveled home and away from Jerusalem, they knew they could not escape the dream that had become a nightmare in which they were still living. These three days in particular had been unbearable. Passover week was always special, but this one held great promise when their Master, Jesus of Nazareth, arrived exactly one week ago in Jerusalem, to a massive crowd of supporters. Cleopas was one of a handful of family members who had known Jesus since His childhood. Three years before when Jesus launched His public ministry, Cleopas not only hoped, but came to believe that Jesus was indeed a great prophet sent by God, along with His cousin John, son of Zechariah, the first genuine messengers of God since the prophet Malachi, who foresaw their coming. As Jesus’ campaign progressed, Cleopas saw with His own eyes and heard with His own ears Jesus’ authoritative teaching and His mighty miracles, and he agreed with many others that Jesus was more than a prophet, that He was the promised Messiah, and as Peter and the other chosen apostles often said, He was the Son of God.**

**On the Day of Preparation, as it began on Thursday evening, Cleopas had heard of the Passover Meal over which Jesus presided with His Twelve; there He declared the New Covenant was beginning, and He instituted a new Holy Meal. All that was left for Jesus to do when the sun rose was to rally the expectant population to storm the Roman palace and run the pagans out of town, to use the divine power He had been given to repeat one of those amazing military victories that God had given to the likes of Joshua, Gideon, Samson, and King David. The glory of the true God would be restored in the new age of a New Israel. It was all set up and ready to happen.**

**But how quickly things changed! One of the actual Twelve, Judas Iscariot, was revealed as a co-conspirator with the corrupt Jewish leaders. His betrayal allowed a late night capture and arrest, so that an illegal, all-night hearing and trial could be conducted and ended, all before sunrise, a monkey-court, an innocent man condemned. By 9:00 am, Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross, and for six hours, Cleopas and the others waited for Jesus to release Himself, show His power, and conquer His enemies. That should be no problem for a Man who turned water into wine instantaneously without magic or deception, who healed blind and deaf and disabled with a word and a touch, who ordered a sea storm to quiet itself, who raised corpses back to life. Yet Jesus did not resist or lift a finger. From Noon until 3:00 pm, a bizarre darkness covered the land, but Jesus still hung silently, and at 3:00 pm He died. He died. A Roman soldier thrust a spear-head into His dead heart, as if there wasn’t enough blood shed. Two members of the Sanhedrin Council took down His body and buried it before sunset. Life ended in death. Light**

**gave way to darkness. Evil prevailed over good. Hope melted into deep despair.**

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**The second day was the Sabbath. Cleopas and the others were stuck in Jerusalem, hunkered down in deep grief, hiding. Would the Jewish leaders now come after the followers of Jesus? Sunday morning could not come too soon. Cleopas would be glad to get out of Jerusalem alive. But as he and his son Simeon got up and around, bereaved and depressed, friends came to spread the word—rumors, maybe foolish gossip—that Jesus’ tomb was empty, His corpse was missing as Peter and John, the main men, confirmed. On top of those disturbing, when-is-it-going-to-end reports, others came to say some of the women were convinced they saw angels who told them Jesus was alive again. But no one who went to the cemetery saw Jesus. What a mess, best thing to do, get away from Jerusalem, from all the craziness. If Jesus really said from the cross that it was over, then it’s all over and done.**

**So Cleopas and Simeon head home to Emmaus. The other Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire who had flooded into Jerusalem during the Passover were exiting, so they could also slip out of the city in a crowd, and then find some solace on the walk back to their village. They could further talk their situation out on the way, maybe gain some clarity outside these city walls that had closed in on the Jesus group.**

**Just as they were discussing all these things and what they might mean, a stranger approached them, a lone traveler. He asked to join them. He looked harmless enough. He listened, then inquired as to just what they were talking about. Cleopas and Simeon stopped cold in their tracks. Their faces dropped. The stranger saw their grief. Presuming this stranger was also a Jewish pilgrim, Cleopas answered, “How could you not know what we are talking about? The headline news in Jerusalem, and in all of Palestine the past few years? You would be the only person in the city this week who didn’t know what has happened!” The stranger feigned ignorance in order to hear them out, and they shared with him openly who they were and what had happened to Jesus and His movement. “We had hoped that He was the Redeemer of Israel.”**

**How could they not recognize Jesus? Especially if they were His Uncle and His cousin? No need to develop theories. The text tells us clearly that *their eyes were kept from recognizing Him*. There is divine intervention going on here. Otherwise, they would have immediately recognized Him. But God, in His purposes, has a different design. His plan for His New Covenant people of the Christian Church will not be founded on, grounded in, or dependent upon human perceptions and experience. These two men are completely clueless this entire time that it is Jesus who is traveling with them.**

**The stranger on the road, after listening to their accounts of the events of the Passover week, now speaks and admonishes them, *O foolish ones, so slow of heart to believe*. . .(and then the stranger points them to the Scriptures), *all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?* And then the stranger began a hours of monologue**

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**leading them from Genesis to Malachi through all the passages that spoke of the**

**coming of the Messiah. *He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* And their hearts *burned within them*, as they became convinced that Jesus’ death and His resurrection were always the salvation plan of God, and that this plan was revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that Jesus Himself had spoken clearly about this to His disciples, but they just didn’t perceive it or receive it, because they didn’t want to believe it.**

**Remember at this point they still do not recognize Jesus and do not realize they are in the middle of a resurrection appearance. Their faith is being kindled by the hidden Savior through the teaching and sharing of the Scriptures. When they arrive at their home, it is evening and the day is nearly spent. They want more, so they invite the stranger to supper. He accepts. As the table is set for the meal to begin, the guest suddenly becomes the Host. The stranger takes up the bread, speaks a blessing upon it, breaks it, and distributes it to the two of them. At that point, Jesus opens their eyes so that they could finally recognize Him. It is Jesus! Their Jesus! My God, my God, He is alive. But before they can say another word, Jesus suddenly disappears, literally vanishes in thin air.**

**What does this event mean? It means that we have a purposefully hidden Savior. The two disciples from Emmaus are led from confusion, doubt, and skepticism to faith in Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. We know Who led them, we know where and when and what and why. But how does a hidden Savior work? It’s all here for us.**

**What caused their hearts to *burn* was that they were hearing the Word of God; at that point it didn’t matter that is was a Stranger speaking it, for this Stranger was *opening up the Scriptures* to them. It wasn’t their ability and experience that made the encounter effective, but the Word. The instruction and teaching of the Word was the necessary precondition for them to enjoy the climax of Jesus’ visit and presence with them—table fellowship in their own home. It was in the breaking of bread, the table fellowship, that the hidden Jesus revealed Himself to them.**

**Jesus opens first the Scriptures to us, then He opens our minds to understand the Scriptures, then He opens our mouths to receive the bread (His Body) He breaks for us, and the wine (His Blood) he pours out for us, and then after serving us as our Teacher and Host at table fellowship, He opens our eyes to see Him who is hidden still from the world, present with us His baptized.**

**And here He will keep coming to serve us as Teacher and Host in His Word and Sacraments, right up until the very Last Day, and, yes, here always a hidden Savior in His means of grace. But when He returns we shall see His face in all His glory, and we will join the whole Church in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. And so we are devoted, as His first disciples, to the “teaching and the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and prayer.” Stay with us, Lord Jesus.**

**Amen.**