

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### **JESUS IS RISEN...HE IS RISEN, INDEED!!**

#### **Hearts on Fire!**

(Luke 24:13-53)

#### **Introduction: Swings...**

Last Tuesday, I mowed my yard while sweating up a storm in shorts and a T-shirt. On Thursday, most of us wore jackets and raingear. This afternoon, the weather will be pretty close to perfect, and 100 degrees is likely in our near future.

Weather swings happen all the time and we're used to them.

Swings in the financial markets, at the gas pumps, and in inflation are harder to get used to - but they are all just as real.

Much more difficult to deal with are emotional swings. Here at church, we will often thank God for the birth of a new baby and hours later will grieve the someone's painful loss.

Over the course of any day we'll all experience emotional ups and downs as we respond to the happy and the hard things that come our way...and some days and some seasons are swingier than others.

*The emotional swings for Jesus' disciples on His last week...*

The last week of Jesus' life would have a season of unparalleled emotional swings for those who followed Him.

We start out on Palm Sunday with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This was a massive victory and would have been sheer delight to His disciples. (Luke 19:28-38)

The next day's temple cleansing was a win, so the disciples would have been happy. Jesus put the Pharisees in their places by restoring the Court of the Gentiles for worship. But the cleansing was dangerous. Jesus made enemies. You could feel the tension. (Luke 19:45-46)

When the chief priests and Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trip Jesus up with hard question, He won every battle to the disciples' great joy. But the menacing looks from the leaders would have been sobering. (Luke 20)

Preparations for Passover were always made with light hearts in anticipation of worship and celebration of God's great works. The disciples spent Thursday, eager for that time together. But the time was filled with tension: a confusing foot-washing, Judas' mysterious exit, Jesus' words about His departure and coming persecution. Everybody was on edge. (Luke 22:1-38)

Late Thursday night, Jesus took them from the upper room in Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane, a familiar and comforting retreat spot. But it wasn't much comfort to watch Jesus retreat to fervent, agonized prayer. (Luke 22:39-46)

The emotional swings got wild and scary from there on.

- Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by armed guards.
- Scared to death, the disciples fled the scene, abandoning Jesus.
- When Peter realized what he had done in denying Jesus, **[Luke 22:62]...he went out and wept bitterly.** Terrible emotion.
- Imagine the emotions of the Apostle John, Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene, and others as they watched Him die.
- Or the emotions of the women while they watched as His body was placed in Joseph's tomb, cementing the defeat.
- The emotions of Saturday were a mix of fear and depression at having lost Jesus. (Luke 22:47-23:55)

With Sunday came a new swing toward sad resolve.

A few of the women turned up at the tomb to finish the preparation of Jesus' body that had been started on Friday afternoon.

But resolve turned to terror when angels showed up. Terror turned to confusion at the angels' news of an empty grave. And confusion gave way to unfettered joy at the sight of Jesus.

The women ran to tell the men what they had seen and heard. And while Peter and John ran to see for themselves, the rest refused to believe this "too good to be true" report.

One of the great pieces of evidence for the truth of what we celebrate today is that no one - not any of the women, not any of the disciples - were expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. They thoroughly believed that His story was over.

The resurrection is not a tale told by over-eager followers trying to keep the Jesus story going. The resurrection shocked every one of them.

Well, the story continues with an amazing conversation that took place on that Sunday that keeps the emotional pendulum swinging. And it is here that we'll spend most of our time this morning.

But, before we look at that conversation, let's turn to the end of Luke's book.

*The scene at the end of Luke's Gospel... (Luke 24:36-53)*

On that Sunday night Jesus appeared to the disciples when they were all together.

They were "***startled and frightened, and thought that they were looking at a spirit.***" (Luke 24:37)

So, He ate a piece of fish to show that it was really Him - and that He was really REAL.

Even though some of them knew that He was alive, they were still shocked that He was standing in the room, having arrived unannounced, uninvited, and without opening a door or a window.

He invited them to examine Him. He wanted them to be sure that it was Him. They were convinced when they saw the scars from the cross.

God allowed those beautiful scars to remain, and they will there throughout eternity to remind us of His love.

Later in the chapter, Jesus gave the disciples a commission that was similar to what we find in Matthew's Gospel.

***[Luke 24:46] "So it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day [47] and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."***

After this, He was physically and literally carried up into heaven. And the book ends with the disciples "***continually in the temple, praising God.***"

Disciples who had been on an emotional roll-coaster now know that Jesus is alive and are filled with Joy.<sup>1</sup>

But what about that interview I mentioned a minute ago? Let's go back to an earlier point in Luke 24.<sup>2</sup>

### **Two Disciples on a Hike (vv. 13-14)**

<sup>1</sup> The departure of Jesus is the climax of Luke's Gospel and the introduction to the book of Acts, the second volume of Luke's writings. Acts chronicles the disciples' obedience to the command of the risen Jesus to take the gospel to all the nations.

<sup>2</sup> Luke is the only one of the four Gospels to include this beautiful story.

At this point, Jesus has been raised. The women having seen angels AND Jesus - have run back to tell the disciples.

They refused to believe - but Peter ran to the now empty tomb, looked in, and left, convinced of the resurrection.

Then, Luke picks up the story of two of the disciples who had been present when the women returned from the tomb.

***[24:13] And behold, on that very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. [14] And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place.***

These two had left Jerusalem at some point on Easter Sunday morning to walk to a small town called Emmaus.

While we learn later that one of these disciples was named Cleopas, we never find out who his friend was.<sup>3</sup>

And we also don't know where Emmaus was. The name means "warm springs" and could have been one of several places. We just don't know where, except that it was roughly seven miles in some direction from Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

They were talking about the events of the last several days.

These would have included the stuff that we find in our Bibles: Jesus' interactions with the religious leaders, His trials, His crucifixion, His burial, the earlier events of Sunday morning.

It becomes clear that their emotions were still swinging. And as they walked along, they were joined by Another.

### **Two Hikers Become Three (vv. 15-24)**

<sup>3</sup> Most scholars believe that neither one of them was an apostle.

<sup>4</sup> One of the best guesses is that Emmaus was seven miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Lydda which was near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

### **The Two Are Joined by [the incognito] Jesus (vv. 15-16)**

***[24:15] While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. [16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.***

We know (because Luke tells us) that this Other was Jesus. For some reason, Cleopas and his friend didn't know. They saw Him only as a stranger on the road coming out of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

This Stranger had been walking faster than the two, caught up with them, and began walking with them. The Stranger spoke.

### **[The incognito] Jesus Questioned Them (v. 17)**

***[24:17] And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they came to a stop, looking sad.***

Catch their mood. This is gloom. This is despair and depression. After they take a moment to collect themselves, they speak.

### **Explaining Jesus to [the incognito] Jesus (vv. 18-24)**

*They are surprised that the stranger is unaware (v. 18)*

***[18] One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You possibly the only one living near Jerusalem who does not know about the things that happened here in these days?"***

Evidently, the news of Jesus' death had made headlines throughout the city, and everybody was talking about it. The Stranger was coming from Jerusalem. How had He not heard?

*"Have you been living in a corner? Are You a hermit? We're talking about Jesus. Haven't you heard about Him?"*

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps His glorified body was not immediately recognizable.

So, on the outside chance that Jesus had not heard about Jesus, they told Jesus all about Jesus.

*They summarize Jesus' life and ministry (vv. 19-21)*

***[19] And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "Those about Jesus the Nazarene, who proved to be a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, [20] and how the chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and crucified Him. [21] But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened."***

Notice that they referred to Jesus as a prophet.

They weren't being disrespectful. To call someone a prophet was to give great honor. But it does tell us that they were NOT thinking of Him as the long-promised Messiah.

*"Yeah, we used to be hoping that Jesus was going to redeem Israel. We had been hoping that Jesus was the one who would restore our nation to its former glory. But he's dead now. We don't hope that anymore, not since what happened on Friday."*

There it is again. Just like the women and the apostles, these two disciples weren't expecting a resurrection. Death is the ultimate finality - and Jesus died on Friday. End of story.

But...there are some strings left dangling. They are puzzled and they let the Stranger in on their confusion.

*They tell of the morning's stunning reports (vv. 22-24)*

***[22] "But also some women among us left us bewildered. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, [23] and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive.***

***[24] And so some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see."***

*"So, you see, Stranger, we're just not sure what to make of it all."*

And now the Stranger speaks. He still didn't identify Himself to Cleopas and his friend. I wonder if they were taken aback by both what He said and how He said what He said to them.

### **[The Incognito] Jesus Opens the Scriptures to Them (vv. 25-27)**

**They Should Have Known... (vv. 25-26)**

***[25] And then He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.***

That's bold. If somebody talks to us that way, we'd be offended. We might get mad. But then He said, ***[26] Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to come into His glory?"***

*"This Jesus guy died? So what? Don't you remember that David's psalm guaranteed that God would not let His anointed decay in the grave? The Messiah's suffering was foretold!"* (See Psalm 16:10 and all of Psalm 22.)

If they were initially offended, they are now at least listening to what the Stranger has to say. And He has a lot to say.

**So They Will Know... (v. 27)**

***[27] Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He explained to them the things written about Himself in all the Scriptures.***

Wouldn't you have loved to have been there for this sermon?

Can you imagine listening for however long Jesus walked with these two as He opened up the entire Old Testament, passage by passage, and applied it to Himself?

*From the beginning (Genesis 3)*

He must have reminded them of the scene in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve sinned, when God said to the serpent -

***[Genesis 3:15] "I will make enemies  
Of you and the woman,  
And of your offspring and her Descendant;  
He shall bruise you on the head,  
And you shall bruise Him on the heel."***

At the very beginning it was revealed that the woman's "***Descendant***" would suffer to save a broken humanity.

*He who did not spare His only Son...*

He must have told the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, and how God provided the ram caught in the brush so that Isaac didn't have to die.

But the parallel between that story and Jesus' story breaks down. The Stranger would have pointed out that on that Friday, God did not spare His Son. He allowed Him to die for the sins of the world.

*Foreshadowed by the Law...*

I'll bet that He went through the Levitical requirements for atonement for sin and shown how, without a perfect sacrifice, there could be no forgiveness.

As these three walked together, Jesus would have told them that the only perfect sacrifice was God's Son, the Messiah?<sup>6</sup>

And Jesus would have peppered His conversation with stories.

*Foretold by stories...*

He would have told the story of the bronze serpent that Moses made in the wilderness after God had sent poisonous snakes into the camp as a punishment for the people's rebellion.

Moses placed that serpent up on a stand so that anyone who had been bitten would be healed if they simply looked on it.

And Jesus would have explained that just as a trusting look at the serpent brought life, the Messiah was lifted up on a cross so that all who looked to Him would be saved.

He spoke, Luke tells us from ALL the prophets.

*Prophesied by all the prophets...*

It is not a stretch to think that Jesus found reference to Himself in Isaiah AND Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi!

But He certainly must have talked with these two about the great prophecies of Isaiah, where the prophet speaks so specifically about the Servant of the Lord, especially as he does in chapter 53.

***[Isaiah 53:2] For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,  
And like a root out of dry ground;  
He has no stately form or majesty  
That we would look at Him,  
Nor an appearance that we would take pleasure in Him.***

***[3] He was despised and abandoned by men,  
A man of great pain and familiar with sickness;  
And like one from whom people hide their faces,  
He was despised, and we had no regard for Him.***

***[4] However, it was our sicknesses that He Himself bore,  
And our pains that He carried;  
Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted,***

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<sup>6</sup> He would have told about the scapegoat, one of the two goats offered by the priest for atonement for sin which was released into the wilderness. As Leviticus tells us, ***[Leviticus 16:22] Then the goat shall carry on itself all their wrongdoings to an isolated territory; he shall release the goat in the wilderness.*** The Messiah was the scapegoat.

***Struck down by God, and humiliated.***

***[5] But He was pierced for our offenses,  
He was crushed for our wrongdoings;  
The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him,  
And by His wounds we are healed.***

***[6] All of us, like sheep, have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the LORD has caused the wrongdoing of us all  
To fall on Him.***

And Isaiah continued, predicting the silence of the Messiah before His accusers (v. 7), the injustice He suffered (v. 8), His burial in a rich man's tomb (v. 9), His life AFTER His death (v. 10), and the sin-bearing work He will accomplish when He dies for sinners. (v. 11)

The more prophecies the Stranger brought up about the Messiah, the more those prophecies all pointed to what these two disciples knew about the life of Jesus.

Like most Jews, these two remembered only the promises of the glories of the Messiah and ignored the predictions of His sufferings. So, the things that they had allowed to destroy their hopes should have been confirmations.

Well, all walks come to an end. This one ends as the three entered the little village of Emmaus.

**A Risen Savior Ignites Hearts! (vv. 28-32)**

**One Journey Ends - Another Begins (vv. 28-29)**

***[28] And they approached the village where they were going,  
and He gave the impression that He was going farther.***

***[29] And so they strongly urged Him, saying, "Stay with us,  
for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So  
He went in to stay with them.***

I love that it was their request, "Stay with us" that prompted Him to stay. That stay opened the way for their eyes to be opened.

Let's just assume that it's near the time of the midday meal when they arrived. They all sit down to eat when "it" happens.

*Jesus "breaks bread" (vv. 30-31)*

***[30] And it came about when He had reclined at the table  
with them, that He took the bread and blessed it, and He broke it  
and began giving it to them.***

And there was something about the way He did all that.

We can almost hear the unnamed disciple saying, "*Cleopas, that sure looked familiar. Remember back in Galilee when Jesus fed the 5,000? How He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it out the same way. Hey, stranger, you're not...*"

***[31] And then their eyes were opened and they recognized  
Him; and He vanished from their sight.***

And with that - Jesus was gone. Poof! Now, listen to what they say in His absence.

*Hearts fan into flame (v. 32)*

***[32] They said to one another, "Were our hearts not burning  
within us when He was speaking to us on the road, while He was  
explaining the Scriptures to us?"***

Their hearts were burning. I don't find that phrase anywhere else in the Bible. But it sure communicates. It says something about excitement, something of passion, something of conviction.

We have all noticed that expressions of love often borrow from the vocabulary of temperature.

If you don't love someone you feel **cold** toward them. If you are losing your affections for someone, you are **cooling** toward them.

To be in love is for the temperature to be on the rise. It is to feel **warm** toward someone. Sitting in front of the freezer doesn't sound very romantic, but snuggling in front of a warm fire does.

It's like in a wedding, when toward the end of the sacred ceremony, in the presence of God and family and friends, the couple has said, "YES!" to the "Will you..." questions.

Right there, in the moment, passions are stirred. You can sometimes feel the temperature between the bride and groom rising. Their hearts catch on fire because of the combination of love, the moment, and the promises.

The hearts of the two disciples were the fuel, the Spirit of God was the air, and the words of Jesus was the spark. Their hearts were set on fire by their new reality: Jesus lives.<sup>7</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

You and I have not come together today for a pep rally to charge each other up with catchy slogans. I'm not trying to get you all excited.

No, actually my purpose is to remind you of Christianity's "weirdness."

Christianity is not mystical or mythical. It is historical. At the heart of our faith is the historical event of the crucifixion of Jesus, and that is strange.

It is strange because in the first century, there was nothing more shameful or pathetic - or objectionable - than the victim of a crucifixion. Crucifixion wasn't mentioned in polite company.

But from Christianity's first days, the followers of Jesus all loudly proclaimed a crucified Messiah.

The cross of Jesus was central to the faith. It even prompted the Apostle Paul to write in his first letter that the cross of Jesus was his greatest "**boast.**" (Galatians 6:14)

Nowhere did Christianity ever go and nowhere has Christianity ever gone without the preaching of the cross.

Why is that?

Well, as Robert Barron wrote this past week in the Wall Street Journal, "*The only finally satisfying rationale [for the preaching of the cross] is the event that is celebrated on Easter Sunday around the...world: the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"<sup>8</sup>

It is simply not credible to suggest that the resurrection is a "symbol or a literary device or an imaginative indicator." No. It is more than that. It is history.

The willingness of the first followers of Jesus to suffer and their passion for spreading the message of Jesus ("*hearts on fire*") were in place ONLY because of their firsthand encounter with the risen Jesus.

Only the resurrection could have empowered these very ordinary men and women to ignore the shame of the cross.

It is true. Jesus conquered the grave. He rose on that first Sunday. He is alive today.

It was God's plan from Genesis forward that Jesus would take the world's center stage on a hill near Jerusalem and be crucified for us all. Every one of the prophets anticipated and foretold this.

And now, having accomplished the work of redemption, He has risen from the dead - and He is alive.

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<sup>7</sup> Small wonder that after He vanished, they found plenty of energy to get up from the table and return to Jerusalem! (Luke 24:33ff)

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from "Our Bodies, Ourselves and Our Lord"; The Wall Street Journal, April 6, 2023.

When the risen Jesus engaged with Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, He listened as they told the story. He heard them tell about their lost hopes. He saw their sadness.

He then scolded them for not taking all the evidence of the Old Testament for the crucifixion and resurrection seriously.

You and I have the same evidence they had PLUS the last two thousand years of Jesus followers who testify to the living presence of Christ.

Today, let the truth of what happened sink in.

Listen to the firsthand testimony recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Think about the changed lives of the first followers.

Process it. Mull it over. Study it and research it and investigate the evidence.

I believe that if you do, you will come to believe, as I do, that the best explanation for all the attention paid to Jesus for the last two thousand years is the one that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus came to believe: Jesus lives!

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!!