

THE WALK TO EMMAUS

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Reading: Luke 24:13-35

When the Lord left this world by the death of His earthly body, all the hopes of His disciples went with Him. They were stunned, terrified, and filled with sadness. But most of all they were without hope, so deeply shocked that they did not know what to think or do. The Lord had taught them such wonderful things about Himself—that He was a King who would set up a kingdom, and the Son of God who had come to save His people. So even when He was sentenced to death they believed that somehow He would still save Himself. And nothing of the kind happened! Seemingly, He just gave in to His enemies. He died, and His body was laid in a tomb. The tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed over it. And the disciples had to try to face the fact that what they had supposed to be impossible had happened.

Now you might think that their sadness would have turned into joy when they were told that the Lord had risen. And later, when the Lord had shown Himself to them, when they had seen with their own eyes that He was not dead but alive for evermore, they *were* glad. But at first the news seemed only to make things worse. You see, the disciples still thought that the body laid in the tomb was the Lord—that at least they still had that. So when they heard that the tomb was empty, they thought that now indeed their Lord had been taken away, and they would never be able to find Him. They had forgotten His promise that He would rise on the third day because they had never understood it, and they were filled with despair.

But no matter how unhappy we are, life must go on. The disciples had to rouse themselves and go about their business. The Jewish sabbath ended at sunset on Saturday. Our Sunday was a working day for them, and sometime during that first Easter Sunday two of the Lord's followers set out on a journey. They left Jerusalem to walk to a village called Emmaus, which lay about seven miles from the city. And on that walk, and at its end, a most wonderful thing happened to them.

As they walked along the road, the two men began to talk about the dreadful things that had happened. As they talked, a stranger came up behind them and began to walk with them. This stranger was the risen Lord, but the two disciples did not know Him. The Lord asked what they were talking about, and why they were so sad. Thinking that He could not have heard of the terrible things that had happened in Jerusalem, one of them, whose name was Cleophas, told Him about the Lord's crucifixion, the empty tomb, and the end of all their hopes.

Very gently, the Lord reproached them for their little faith. And then He explained all the things written in the Word about Himself. He showed that the very things which made them so sad were not the end but the beginning, that they had to happen so that the Lord could come into His glory. The men listened attentively,

but they did not know that their teacher was the Lord Himself. They supposed they were being taught by a man.

When they came to Emmaus, the disciples begged the Lord to stay with them, as it was now evening, and He did so. Then, as they sat at the table for supper, a wonderful thing happened. The Lord took a loaf of bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them. With this—the very thing the Lord had done before feeding the multitudes and before giving the Holy Supper to the apostles—the eyes of the two disciples were opened, and they knew Him. They knew Him for the very Lord they had believed dead, and at once He vanished from their sight. The two disciples reminded each other how their hearts had burned within them as He talked with them on the road. At once they rose up, hurried back to Jerusalem as quickly as they could, and told the apostles that the Lord was risen indeed.

This story of the walk to Emmaus all happened, just as it is written. But it also tells us about something that happens in the minds of people who love the Lord, follow Him, and are taught by Him as His disciples.

In childhood you see the Lord in the stories of the Word and understand His teachings in a certain way, and you suppose that what you then have will stay with you always—that the Lord, as you see and understand Him, will build His kingdom in your heart and mind. However, that cannot be. If the Lord is to set up His everlasting kingdom in your mind you must learn to see Him in a new way as you grow up. You must come to see Him as He appears in the Word for the New Church—in the Heavenly Doctrine—and understand His teachings as they are given in that Word. And for a time you will be like the disciples between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. You will not yet be ready to see the Lord in this new way, yet you will no longer be able to see Him as you used to. It will seem that He has been taken away and that you do not know where to find Him.

But if you truly love the Lord He will still be with you, even though you cannot see Him. And without your knowing it, He will be making you ready to see Him in His new Word. He will set your feet on the road to Emmaus; He will lead you to read and study His Word, and to learn from the church about what it teaches. You will not know that it is the Lord who is teaching you. It will seem that you are teaching yourself, or that you are being taught by other people, by ministers and teachers. But it will really be the Lord who is teaching you, and when you have learned truth from Him, the Lord will then lead you to *do* what it teaches.

You will have come with the Lord to Emmaus. You will have learned the most important of all lessons—that the Lord is seen and known, not in learning truth, but in doing the good that truth teaches.

Amen.