

The heart of today's Gospel and the message of today's liturgy are the final words of our Lord in the Gospel reading appointed for today: **“you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”** It repeats what He says in the middle of the reading: **“you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.”**

What our Lord speaks of here in the Upper Room on the night He was betrayed is, in fact, what we see fulfilled, proven true, in the account in Luke's Gospel of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And it is that reading, historically read and preached on on Easter Monday, that I want to focus on today. Not only because it directly relates to today's Gospel, but also because it is an important text on the Resurrection that we really don't get to hear read and preached to us. It is also worth knowing because it is instructive for Christian worship.

[Read Luke 24:13 – 35]

The two disciples are in a sad and sorry state. They are leaving Jerusalem and the text makes clear it is because they have given up. They are sad and bewildered because of all that has happened. This passage has what I call perhaps the saddest verse in all the Bible: **“we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel.”** There was that hope they had. There had been the joy in thinking Jesus was the promised Redeemer, for He was **“mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”** But then the things of the past week happened. The **“chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death and crucified Him.”** They do not hope any longer.

Notice they get the facts of that morning's events right. They know the news of the women, having gone to the tomb, finding the body is gone. The report of the angels who said Jesus was alive. They know that others of their number, who we know from John's Gospel to be Peter and John, go and check it out, yep, the tomb is open and empty. But this is reported not with the joy of belief in these things, it is the still yet joyless summary of facts, no confidence in what they mean.

And who is it they report all this to? The Risen Lord Himself. Their eyes are kept from recognizing Him. It is important to know that He is not playing games with them in that He does this. He is, as we heard last week, the Good Shepherd, the Good Pastor. He hears from their own lips their confession of where they are at in all this.

It is then that He preaches to them. He rebukes them, offers correction to what they lack, which is not knowing the facts, but what they mean. They are **“slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?”** The Scriptures teach that the greatest glory, the source of lasting joy comes by means of the Christ suffering these things. And then we are told that **“beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”** He preaches to them. He shows how what has happened is what needed to happen, was foretold by the Scriptures, promised in the Old Testament writings.

As one of them later reflects, it is during this sermon, it is not by seeing and recognizing the Lord with their fleshly eyes, but in hearing the Scriptures, that their hearts burn within them. This is wonderfully captured in the bulletin art today. You see on the left clasped and raised hands, the renewal of hope, on the right, the expression of joy being rekindled in the heart. It is as He had said in the Upper Room, He will see them again, and from that will come everlasting joy. They do not yet see Him and know who He is. He sees them, He comes to them, He speaks to them, and it is that Word that gives joy, hope restored.

It is after preaching to them, at the destination, invited in to dine, that Jesus reveals Himself as host and meal. Taking bread, giving thanks, breaking it and giving it, it is then that He is revealed to them. It then says, “**He vanished from their sight.**” It doesn’t say He left, that He went away. Simply that He wasn’t seen. Because still there is the bread, blessed and given them by the Lord. He remains with them, and so also the joy in being seen by the risen Lord, given through the Word and the bread.

This is instructive for us and a comfort to us. We see how the Lord preaches to prepare them for what He will give them at table. We see here not the only but certainly one of the chief purposes of preaching. It is designed by our Lord to open our hearts, to give and sustain faith in His Word, and to then lead us to the table, to prepare us to receive Him as He comes to us once again as host and meal.

This is why preaching is always to precede the Sacrament. There is always to be exposition of the Word of God before the Holy Communion. That is ordinarily done through the sermon in the context of the Divine Service on Sunday or a feast day. But even if I come visit you in the hospital or at home, I will never simply offer the Sacrament. There is always, even if a bit more informal than here, a preaching of the Word, to prepare the hearts of the hearers, to rebuke and call to repentance for slowness of heart to believe, and to open up the Scriptures which testify of our Lord.

This is important to know because from time to time I hear of churches, even congregations of our fellowship, in our Synod, who want to be innovative, change things up, and will offer the Sacrament before the Word of God. Should you find yourself in such a church, you are not to commune there. Because that practice is not simply a departure from tradition, a rejection of the historic pattern of Christian worship, but a departure from the very pattern set by our Lord Himself, a pattern which is designed to prepare believing hearts that will worthily receive Him in the Holy Communion.

This passage is also a great comfort. Our Lord’s preparation of the disciples for what was to come with His arrest and passion also holds true for the Church as She awaits the Lord’s return. We do not see Him, He is not present with us as He was between His incarnation and ascension. During this time, as He is hidden from the eyes, the world deems us ignorant fools and rejoices that we must suffer humiliation and mockery.

This is a time of weeping and sorrow. We are so often tempted to despair, to give up hope. But as He did for the two on the Emmaus Road, the Lord sees us. He comes hidden, not discernable to the eyes, but He speaks. Through His preachers He directs His Christians to what He has said, to what has been promised and now stands fulfilled, thus showing Him worthy of trust when He promises what is yet to come. He then gives Himself in the breaking of the bread, discerned now even still only by faith, until the day we long for, when we shall see Him even as He now sees us, will come, the final and eternal Easter, when we will no longer walk on the way, but will be home with Him.