

The Road to Emmaus

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Eastertide (May) 2009

Despite appearances or impressions to the contrary, “Easter” is *not* a single day, but an entire season of *fifty days*! And although we are never focused elsewhere than the Cross & Resurrection of Our Lord (*as St. Paul expounds to the Corinthians*), we are all the more intent upon these sacred “Mysteries” of the faith during Eastertide.

These seven weeks of Easter, culminating in the Feast of “Pentecost” (the “fiftieth” day), are the foundation and bulwark of the Christian year. Indeed, the Resurrection of our Lord enlightens and informs the Divine Liturgy and our Christian worship throughout the year, to such an extent that each and every Sunday is a “little Easter” (or, as others have put it, the Feast of the Resurrection is simply a “big Sunday”).

Historically, these seven weeks of Easter have also been a time of “mystagogy.” That is simply a way of saying that our focus is on the life we have in Christ—specifically in the Liturgy and Sacraments. Just as the seven weeks of Lent were spent in “catechesis,” learning the Christian faith and life, so now are the weeks of Easter spent in reflection on Holy Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the weekly Divine Service, in which each of us participates in the saving life of Christ.

The Resurrection is a gracious invitation to find our life—a true, eternal life—in the Cross and Passion of our Lord. That alone is the answer to the suffering that we face in our own lives and in the world around us. For in Christ we see, first of all, that our Lord has shared our suffering and taken it upon Himself; and second, that by His suffering and death in our place, He has destroyed the power of death and opened up for us the gates of heaven and eternal life. No matter what we must endure because of sin in this world, we believe and confess that it will end in life everlasting with the Holy Triune God.

A SERMON BASED UPON DR. LUTHER'S PREACHING OF ST JOHN 20:19–31

In the Name ☩ of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]

The first part of this story—of Christ appearing to His disciples when they (Thomas excepted) were gathered together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews—occurred a week earlier, on the evening of Easter Sunday. The second part—when the Lord appeared to His disciples with Thomas present—occurred a week after Easter. Both of these appearances demonstrate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead, and so the disciples, strengthened in the belief of His resurrection, are not only made certain of this article, but can witness to it with steadfastness of purpose to the world.

In addition to this manifestation, this Gospel includes other teachings and examples that are useful and comforting. First, it is good to note that the Lord does not wait for His disciples to go after Him, but He goes after them—through locked doors; He greets them in a friendly manner, comforts and strengthens them in the faith of His resurrection. He could hardly have done so in a more kindly manner than by offering peace and showing them His hands and side, in order to assure them of His resurrection and to comfort them against all sorrow and fear. There is nothing unpleasant or fearful here. The greeting is sweet and pleasing. For “peace” in Hebrew signifies all good, happiness, and well-being. “Peace be with you” is a liturgical greeting (similar to those that we also use), indicating the gracious presence of God. His appearing is also very comforting because He shows His hands and side to the disciples, who had quite despaired of Him, and had no hope of His being alive.

With this example Christ opens up His heart to show us who He is, how He is, and what kind of heart and will He bears toward us—as a comfort to all kinds of troubled, frightened, and fearful hearts—so that you and I need not fear, but may hope for all good things and every kindness from Him. He comforts and strengthens His disciples

who love Him and rejoice at His coming, as the Holy Evangelist writes, “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” But those who despise Him, He will punish at the proper time (while meanwhile He is patient and longsuffering). We should come to know Christ in this way: that He is kindly disposed and comforting to all the poor who are needy and anxious, and that He grants peace and forgiveness (to save them). To know Him this way is to know Him rightly.

Therefore, you may expect from Christ all love, kindness, comfort, salvation, and encouragement, and call on Him in perils, in death, and in all assaults upon your faith. For He is the only Cornerstone to whom you may hold in all your troubles. When you fall into danger, or when you are dying, hold firmly to Him, and pray: “Lord, I know You will not forsake me; You will help me through.”

This is the first part of this Gospel: that Christ treats the disciples so tenderly; that He does not reproach them for their unbelief, sin or weakness, but He strengthens them and lifts them up. This He did also for your comfort and benefit. When the devil attacks you, as St Peter writes: “Your adversary the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,” you do well to keep this example of Christ’s kindness and love in mind, that you may take comfort and stand fast against the enemy.

Second, we note in this Gospel that Christ sends His disciples just as He is sent by His Father. It is our great comfort and joy to hear His holy Word through those who received the same Word from these Apostles. It is a great and glorious thing for me and other preachers and servants of the Word to have this same treasure that Christ gave to His Apostles—namely, the treasure of His sending with authority in His Name and stead (which is the nature and importance of the Divine Call and Ordination to the Office of the Holy Ministry). Therein Christ also gave to His Apostles and His Ministers the special authority to forgive or retain sins whenever and as often as necessary.

Thus, if you are frightened and afflicted by your sins, you should listen to the one who has been sent to you by Christ, who comes to you with the power and comfort of God's Word. Believe his words, as if God Himself were speaking to you.

By the same token, if you in your prideful self-assurance go astray and sin obstinately, and your pastor admonishes you accordingly—retaining your sin (withholding forgiveness) until you repent—your sins are indeed retained by Christ Himself before the Father in heaven.

For these are the words of the Lord's commission: "As My Father has sent Me, so I send you also." Which is to say, "Just as I forgive the poor sinners who repent, and on the other hand retain the sins of the hardheaded and self-assured 'holy ones' who will not repent, you should also (as My servants) forgive or retain sins in accordance with My Word." This is the command, that the preaching of Jesus Christ should continue in this way and to this end: that all who believe in Him should be forgiven all their sins; but for those who do not believe, their sins should be retained (in order to call them to repentance).

It is a great and excellent thing for the mouth of every honest minister and preacher to be Christ's mouth, and for his word and forgiveness to be Christ's word and forgiveness. Whenever and however you sin, and you confess your sin (thereby indicating your repentant faith in Christ and His Gospel), then your Pastor will forgive you all your sins in the Name and stead of Christ—and those words of forgiveness that he speaks to you on God's behalf, you are to hear and receive as words that Christ Himself has thereby spoken to you. Therefore, it is right to call the word of the minister and preacher which he preaches the Word of God; for the Office is not the minister's and the preacher's, but God's; and the Word that he preaches is likewise not the minister's and preacher's, but God's.

Therefore, it is a terrible, terrible thing if anyone will not hear God's Word. For no doubt this person will at some time have to hear the

devil's word, if he is not already hearing it. For who can put into words or sufficiently appreciate what a great mercy or what an exceedingly wonderful thing it is, that we can hear God's Word—indeed God Himself—through the mouth of our Pastor, who is also our brother in Christ? They are godless, foolish people who go searching high and low for the truth, or who rely upon their own thoughts and feelings for a supposed truth or so-called “spiritual” insight—looking for God by gazing at their navels, as it were—when Christ has placed the great and priceless treasure of His Word (especially His Word of forgiveness) in the mouth of His servant.

If anyone knew of a church on earth where God's voice could be heard, wouldn't everybody run to get there! And yet, they would hear nothing more and nothing better than what they hear from the Minister of Christ in their own congregation.

Of all the blessings that he received from God, King David counted this to be the highest and most precious treasure, that God had given him a kingdom in which God's Word was taught; as David sings in the Psalms: “God speaks in His sanctuary, of this I am glad.” We can also boast of this, that God speaks the treasure of His Word to us—here in this very church.

It is for this very reason that the Christian Church on earth is such a beautiful and glorious thing—because we can hear what God speaks, and what He desires of us: namely, that we should repent, be baptized in His Name, and believe on His Son Jesus Christ, confess our faith with Christian fruits, be obedient to God, and serve our neighbor.

These things are preached to us week after week, and year after year, even though we so often pass them by without paying any heed. We should give our Lord God heartfelt thanks for this unspeakable gift of His Word and the preaching of it. For God's Word is the true sanctuary, through which the Christian Church and all Christians are sanctified. And yet, too often we do not regard this treasure, and we are worse than Thomas, implying at times that we do not even want to see or hear the dear, priceless treasure of God's Word.

Pray that our Lord, by His grace, would put away this hardness from our sinful hearts! Let Him punish and reprove us ever so hard, whatever He wishes; only let Him not take his Holy Word away from us, nor allow any others to steal or pervert His Word.

Now then, the third point of this Holy Gospel from St John concerns Thomas. He seems to have been a gruff man. He is so unbelieving and unbending, not wanting to believe Peter, or the women, or any of the other disciples who say to him, “We have seen the Lord.” He adamantly insists that he must see the nail prints in the Lord’s hands, that he be able to put his fingers into those nail prints, and his hand into the Lord’s wounded side. As far as Thomas was concerned, it must have been a spirit that the disciples and women saw; and they merely thought they had seen the Lord. Therefore, he will not believe unless he sees the nail prints, touching & feeling them with his hands.

That Thomas was not willing to believe until he could see the wounds of the Lord with his eyes and poke at them with his paws, is indeed a great insolence and inflexible obstinacy. Nevertheless, Christ bears this insolence and obstinacy, and He does not reject poor Thomas for it. Christ Jesus comes a week after Easter when Thomas is gathered with the disciples, and He shows him those very scars that he desired to see, allowing Thomas to put his finger and hand into the scars, that he would come out of unbelief into belief and out of gross ignorance to a certain, clear knowledge and light. He does him this special favor in the presence of the other disciples, not only showing Himself but letting Himself be grasped and felt in the nail scars and in His side, and says to him, “Be not unbelieving but believing.”

This is written for your sake, that you may learn how Christ loves you, and how amiably, gently, and mildly He deals with His disciples, and so with you. With the godless unbelievers who do not regard Him at all, He is stern and severe. But He does not desire to overturn or reject the weak in faith; so, He bears patiently with your weakness, not snarling at you frightfully, but handling you gently & respectfully. He demonstrates this here with Thomas, who although crude and simpleminded, is not unfaithful and malicious, but faithful and pious.

He is thinking: I would like to believe that Christ rose from the dead, if I only could. He wishes that it might be true; but for all that, he cannot believe. So it is that you and I, by sinful nature, are unable to believe in Christ and His Gospel—even at our best.

But see in the case of Thomas how Christ seeks him faithfully, bears with his obstinacy, and brings him to faith. This example, as I said, was recorded for your sake. In much the same way that St Paul writes of himself that he obtained mercy so that in him Christ might show all patience as an example to those who should believe on Him unto eternal life; so, too, was Thomas shown this patience, in order that Christ Jesus might show an example of His great kindness to all who are weak and simple.

In this story, then, we see—not only in the example of Thomas, but also in the case of all the other disciples—what a very gracious Lord you have in Christ, who treats you neither sternly nor harshly, but seeks you out and comforts you as sheep gone astray. For He does *not* say to the disciples, “You have forsaken Me; you were offended by Me; you ran away from Me, and denied Me, so now I don’t want you any more.” No! Instead, He bears their weakness with long-suffering patience; He does not make them suffer because they sinned so grossly against Him (and they continue to sin). It was no small thing for them to fall away before the Cross, but now also after His resurrection they are so unbelieving! Yet, He comes to them with mercy and forgiveness—and what is more, through them, as the first of His Ministers, He provides for the forgiveness of your sins, as well, through the Office of the Keys with His Word of Absolution. That was the purpose of His Cross and Passion, and that is the how He deals with you, with His great mercy and compassion.

So do you have life and salvation in His Resurrection. In His dear Name, and for His sake. Amen.

In the Name † of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]

PRAY AT ALL TIMES

Reflections on the Sermon of 3–18–2009

Pray in earnest for all things.
Much comfort, Christ ever brings.

It all depends on God's grace.
Let His love show on your face.

The Holy Spirit teaches us to pray.
Pray in Jesus' Name, often, every day.

By God's mercy, He will answer our prayer.
His bountiful gifts, He will eagerly share.

Christ will ever keep us safe under His protection.
We could never live like Jesus and His perfection.

Regardless, we can still win,
for Christ will atone and forgive our sin.

God gives us salvation by His cross.
Ever call upon Him, He is the Boss.

Eldon Knepp, Elder

RLA Children Singing at Emmaus on Good Shepherd Sunday:

The Fourth Sunday of Easter (this year on May the 3rd) is “Good Shepherd Sunday,” and we will be pleased to have some of the little lambs and sheep of Resurrection Lutheran Academy here at Emmaus on that Sunday to sing with us and for us on some of the hymns. Let us welcome them gladly and rejoice with them in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Northern Indiana Spring Pastors’ Conference (11–12 May):

Pastor Grobien and I will be attending the Northern Indiana District Spring Pastors’ Conference on Monday the 11th and Tuesday the 12th of May. The focus this year will be on the preaching of the early church fathers, that we might learn from their theology and practice in our own preaching of the Gospel now. Please remember all of us pastors in your prayers, as we travel to and from the conference, and as we study the Word of God together to the glory of His holy name.

The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord (21 May):

The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, always the fortieth day of Eastertide, is on Thursday the 21st of May this year. Emmaus will be gathered on that important day to celebrate the Feast in the Divine Service, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Our Lord’s Ascension into heaven, to the right hand of His Father, is the culmination of His great journey from heaven to earth, into the depths of our sin and death, and back into life with God in our flesh. All of this He has done on our behalf, and for our benefit, so that we might live with God forever, resurrected and glorified in our bodies, seated with Christ in the heavenly places; even now hidden with Him in God, safe and secure in the bosom of His Father forever and ever. For He feeds us here on earth with the same holy Body that has been crucified for us, in which He has risen and ascended into heaven.

Evening Prayer on the Eve of Pentecost Day (30 May):

In anticipation of the Feast of Pentecost, the fiftieth day of Easter, **Emmaus will be gathered for Evening Prayer on Saturday the 30th of May, beginning at 7:00 p.m.** By the Word of God and prayer, we wait upon His gracious gift of the Holy Spirit and call upon the Name of the Lord in the sure and certain hope of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ Jesus.

The Feast of Pentecost Day will then be celebrated on Sunday the 31st of May, following the order of the Chorale Communion Service (that is, Divine Service, Setting Five in the *Lutheran Service Book*).

The Feast of the Visitation of Our Lord (transferred to 1 June):

The important Feast of the Visitation of Our Lord, which is marked on the 31st of May, coincides this year with Pentecost Day, which of course takes precedence on that Sunday morning. Emmaus will then be gathered to celebrate the Visitation on the following evening, that is, on Monday the 1st of June, beginning at 7:00 p.m. In the Divine Service, our dear Lord Jesus comes to visit us with grace, mercy and peace, in the same flesh and blood conceived and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, hidden now for us in the womb of His Church.

Individual Confession and Holy Absolution in May:

In the month of May, I will be vested and available in the Emmaus sanctuary for Confession and Absolution on **Saturday the 2nd**, from 5:00 until 7:00 p.m. If someone is already in confession when you arrive, you are welcome to wait in the library at the back of the church. Otherwise, if no one else is already in confession, you may come forward whenever you are ready.

Pastor Grobien will similarly be available for Individual Confession and Absolution on Friday the 22nd.

This Means of Grace, instituted by Christ Himself, is freely offered to be freely received in repentant faith. If you have questions concerning this Christian practice, you are invited and encouraged to speak with me any time, whether in Bible Class or privately. Of course, all confessions are strictly confidential, as I promised under oath before the Holy Triune God and His Church at my Ordination.

Looking Ahead to the Annual Catechesis Symposium in June:

As I have done a number of times in past years, I will be a speaker at the annual Catechesis Symposium in Sussex, Wisconsin, this June. The focus this year will be on the challenge of contemporary worship, and I will be presenting a paper on the role of rites and ceremonies, liturgical forms and orders of service, in support of the Gospel and faith. The Symposium is from Wednesday the 17th through Friday the 19th of June. Other speakers will be Rev. Peter Bender, Rev. Dr. Burnell Eckardt, Rev. Dr. Paul Grime, Rev. David Petersen, and church musician, Mr. Stephen Johnson (a friend of Pastor Grobien). Anyone who might be interested in attending the Symposium would be welcome to speak with me for more information, costs, etc.

Seminarian Sam Wirgau Assigned to Vicarage in Lockport, IL:

For those who have not yet heard, I am very pleased to share the news that my son-in-law, Seminarian Sam Wirgau, has been assigned to serve his vicarage this coming year at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Lockport, Illinois (in the Joliet area). The pastor there, the Reverend Mark Hein, is a seminary classmate of mine, a gentle man and a good and faithful servant of Christ and His Word; so I rejoice in that, for my son-in-law in his vicarage, and also for my daughter and granddaughter, that they will continue to be well-served by the Gospel this coming year. Of course, I am also quite happy that these good things will be located only a couple hours away. LaRena and I are hoping to be in Lockport with our family for Sam's installation on 21 June. Please do remember him and his family in your prayers. Thanks.

The Indiana District (LCMS) Convention (25-26 June):

The Indiana District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will be meeting in convention, in Fort Wayne, in late June: on Thursday the 25th and the 26th of the month. Emmaus will be represented at the convention by me as senior pastor, and by our lay delegate, Mr. Dave Smith, who also serves as one of our elders and as the president of our congregation at this time. Please remember the two of us in your prayers, along with all of the other pastoral and lay delegates from the district, as we prepare for and participate in the convention, that all our deliberations and decisions may be wise and God-pleasing ones.

Your servant in Christ Jesus, Pastor Rick Stuckwisch

PASTOR GROBIEN AND FAMILY ON VACATION IN JUNE

Pastor Grobien and family will be on vacation from the 29th of May until the middle of June. They will be visiting with Regina's mother and family in Pennsylvania, celebrating both her brother's wedding and another family wedding. Please remember the Grobien's in your prayers as they are traveling, and as they rejoice in these happy days.

ON THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS AND CONFESSION THE FIFTH CHIEF PART OF THE SMALL CATECHISM

A member of the Congregation called my attention to the following excerpt from a wonderful book on the Small Catechism and the chief parts of the Christian faith: *To All Eternity: The Essential Teachings of Christianity* (CPH, 2002), by Edward Engelbrecht, Howard Grube, Raymond Hartwig, Jeffrey Kunze, Erik Rottmann, Rodney Rathmann, and Harold Senkbeil.

In a medieval painting, an artist portrayed the foolishness of human sin in action. In 1501 Antonio di Giuseppe Rinaldeschi vandalized an image of Jesus' mother by throwing dung on it. Apparently, Antonio had just lost a bet and blamed God for his failure. Enraged, he threw the dung and fled the city. For this sacrilege a mob arrested and condemned him. Yet another panel of the painting shows the penitent Antonio receiving absolution for all his sins, including the sins the mob considered unforgivable.

In His merciful love, Jesus Christ has not only ransomed us from sin by His death, but He has also provided for the continual forgiveness of sins in His church. He has commissioned His church to continue His work on earth by forgiving the sins of penitent sinners in His name and stead. His called servants exercise this power publicly for the church.

Full Forgiveness: That's the way it works still today in Christ's church. Whenever the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, they do His heavenly work here on earth. Sins are erased, hearts are cleansed, and souls are restored in Jesus' name. By the grace of God, our pastor's absolution is valid and certain not merely on earth, but also in heaven—as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself!

When sin has its way with us, all too often we feel so defiled and dirty that there seems no way on earth we could ever be forgiven. At these times, we need to seek out our pastor, who will deal with us compassionately and gently in Jesus' name. We can confess openly, without fear, for every pastor is under solemn obligation never to divulge sins spoken to him in confession. We should think of his ears as God's ears and freely give voice to the hurt and burden of our sin. More than that, we should regard our pastor's mouth as God's mouth when the pastor speaks God's own absolving Word that our heart is aching to hear.

Valid and Certain: As the example of Antonio shows, sin happens. Ever since Adam and Eve first rebelled against God, the sinful mind is hostile toward God, constantly hatching plots that defy Him and injure our neighbor. The problem goes still deeper: the human heart itself is the culprit. Even the most moral and upright person has a heart inwardly polluted by sin and filth, the continual source of all kinds of mischief that wars against the soul (Matthew 15:19).

Yet imagine that you had a direct line to heaven and were able to hear God's own voice with a personalized word of forgiveness tailor-made just for you. Wouldn't that be a terrific, freeing experience? That's exactly what Jesus Christ has provided for His church in the gift of absolution through the mouth of His called servants. That Word erases sin, drives out both fear and shame, and in its place bestows the very life of Christ to all who love and trust in Him. Wouldn't you like to hear that Word for yourself? (*To All Eternity*, pp. 99–100)



A PLACE OF PEACE

Reflections on the Sermon of 3-15-2009

Our Father's house is a place of peace.
While there, all malicious acts and thoughts cease.

There, love and grace continually abide.
It's a place of peace, with nothing to hide.

Jesus suffered for our sin.
He has forgiven our sin.

His Father's house is a place of rest for us.
We will ever be indebted to Him, thus.

He has done it all, for you and me.
From our sins we are set free.

He commands us how to live,
and urges us to eagerly give.

We are ever at peace with Him,
for we live by faith in Him.

By His Cross He has fixed all things.
Unto us, His peace He brings.

Our Father's house will ever be our home.
From it, may we never roam.

Eldon Knepp, Elder