

From the Shadow of Death into Easter Joy
Sermon for Easter Monday
Sermon Text: Luke 24:13-35



That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.¹⁷ And He said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered Him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"¹⁹ And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.²¹ But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning,²³ and when they did not find His body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see."²⁵ And He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?"²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if He were going farther,²⁹ but they urged Him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So He went in to stay with them.³⁰ When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And He vanished from their sight.³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?"³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

After the first sting of news about a death has penetrated the heart and the initial shock has been endured, it can be comforting to busy oneself with the little things. You make a cup of tea with your family or work on the first steps in preparing for the funeral. So it was with the women who went to Jesus' tomb to anoint His body with fragrant oils, and then they weren't even allowed to do that! An angel blocked their path and then asked this strange question: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5) It took a while but finally the women understood. At Easter, it's not appropriate to perform burial rituals. And so they laid aside the fragrant oils and everything else that went along with burying a loved one and proclaimed the Good News: "the Lord is risen!" This message was not well received. The women's news was not enough to disturb death. Some even tried to hold tight to death until the bitter end. The disciples on their way to Emmaus were such people. You can see them in the picture. They are like those returning from a funeral. Burial rituals usually have a fairly fixed schedule that eventually ends with everyone returning to their own private lives. So it is with the Emmaus disciples. They are on their way home and they're busying themselves with conversation about all the things that have happened in the last few days. They are still grappling with Jesus' cruel death. They only speak about His earthly life. They talk specifically about the rumor of His resurrection, but they don't take that seriously at all. They are still coming to grips with death and don't know about the resurrection. You can see this in the above picture. Both are bent under the weight of death. The rumor of resurrection shines on them from behind. But none of that fit together in their heads and it certainly wasn't part of the plan. We can observe the events of the Emmaus disciples from the outside. We have a clear advantage because we know what happened. We know that Jesus rose from the dead and we know that He will meet these two on the road. They couldn't have known all of this when they went on their way so unsuspectingly and under the burden of death. Yet, these two disciples from Emmaus are very similar to us. We also have heard about Jesus' resurrection. We too have heard that death didn't have the last

word over Jesus. Death has lost its sting for us as well. We know that after death, we will be with Jesus. We also know that when we return from a funeral the last word has not been spoken and the place of burial is not only the place of decay, but also the place of resurrection. And yet, all of this doesn't fit into our heads either. It doesn't fit because it goes over our horizon of experience. We only know the place of death. We only experience death. We have as much experience of the resurrection of the dead as the disciples from Emmaus at that time. It can even be that this idea of resurrection is so foreign to us that we prefer not to deal with it at all. Similarly to the Emmaus disciples, we may even see it as a disturbing factor – that some women dared to say that Jesus isn't dead at all but has risen. The two Emmaus disciples, as we see them in the picture, are so firmly in the grip of death that they cling to it. They don't want and can't believe in the resurrection. Can it be that we too prefer a dead Christ more than a living Christ? Can it be that the living Christ is like a stumbling block in our path and just bothers us because we would rather have Him dead? Because we prefer to deal with things that belong to death? We seek the living among the dead! We hold on to the things that have the seal of death and not the seal of resurrection. We hold on to our money, our achievements, our outward appearance, as if the whole of eternal blessedness depended upon it. As if these things were life. How important it is that we let the voices of the women and angels ring out again and again: "The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!" If we do that, it would mean that we have to change our view. Similarly to the Emmaus disciples who belonged to death at that time. We are to put death aside and grab hold of the things that belong to life. We are to align ourselves to the living Christ – focus on life and not on death!

All this happens in an awesome way. The picture of the Emmaus disciples doesn't end with them walking down the road, bowed by death. No, the artist Schmitt Rottluff painted a second picture. This time, it's with Jesus:



Interestingly, the two disciples are still clueless that Jesus is in their midst. Jesus walks between them. They are no longer alone in their sorrow, but they still remain blind and they still cling to death. Even here, we resemble the disciples on their way to Emmaus. Jesus is always there. He is even there when we can't sense that He's there. And He walks our path with us. He also shares our grief with us. Even then, and especially then, when we carry a dead person to the grave. Yes, everything we do and don't do must be done in faith and in the knowledge of the living Christ who walks with us. The two disciples at Emmaus have one more question, they ask: "Stay with us!" And Jesus stays, He stays with them. He remains

audible in His Word.



He remains present in His body and in His blood. The Lord Jesus, who we receive in church, is the risen Lord. It is He who walked with the Emmaus disciples at that time. He is the one who transformed the two from a mourning community into a joyful community. And He doesn't want to stay just with the two of them in blissful harmony. Something changes in them. It changes so much that instead of choosing the path of a mourning community, they choose the path of the joyful resurrection community. Their path makes a 180 degree turn in the opposite direction. They return to Jerusalem and their voices join with the many who cry out: "The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!" Just as the Lord walked with the disciples of Emmaus, He

also walks with us. The Lord wants to be with us. He wants to celebrate Communion with us. But He doesn't only want that, He also wants to go with us to work, be with us among our family, and everywhere where we meet other people who don't yet believe in Him, who also don't yet believe that He is alive. We can give these people our full attention, just like Jesus did with the Emmaus disciples back then. Gradually they were able to understand! Gradually, we can also show the people around us the path from death to life. And since Jesus has shown Himself in your life and mine so often and in so many different ways, He can also appear to others. So we all cry out together with loud voices: "He is risen. He is risen indeed!" A blessed Easter to you! Amen.