

Third Sunday of Easter  
April 6, 2008

St. Mark Lutheran Church  
Rev. Alan Wolkenhauer

(Luke 24:13-35) Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, (14) and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. (15) While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, (16) but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. (17) And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. (18) Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" (19) He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, (20) and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over 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 took place. (22) Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, (23) and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed 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 they did not see him." (25) Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! (26) Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (27) Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. (28) As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. (29) But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. (30) When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. (31) Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. (32) They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (33) That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. (34) They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" (35) Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

## They Recognized Him

"They recognized him," Luke says of the disciples who had walked with Jesus to their home in Emmaus. "They recognized him." For seven miles, they had not. They'd walked and talked with Jesus. He'd explained how it had been necessary for the Messiah to suffer many things and then enter into his glory. He'd interpreted Scripture for them. They'd even invited him into their home to stay with them that evening. But they hadn't recognized him.

Yet still, he touched them. Even though they hadn't known it was the Lord, they'd listened to him and their hearts had burned within them. Even

though they were in pain – suffering broken hopes, terrible memories, and an uncertain future, they allowed him to walk beside them. Even though they thought he was a stranger – ignorant of their history, their struggles, and their dreams, they had welcomed him on their journey; they'd been willing to learn from him. And they had been blessed. Because finally, as he broke bread and gave it to them, they recognized their risen Lord.

Last Sunday, we celebrated the fifth anniversary of my pastoral call to St. Mark. In some ways, it seems like just yesterday that we began to share this ministry together. But in other ways, it feels like I've known you all my life. It's hard to believe that I once had to consult a picture book to remember who Charlotte was or that I had to double-check my notes to make sure of Dale's name. It seems strange that I haven't always worked with Jeanne or that there were other organists in my life before Cheryl. You see, when I began this ministry, I didn't know who you were, but as we've shared this journey, as we've listened to God's Word, as we've gathered around the font and the altar, we've come to recognized Jesus in each other.

Last week I shared the peace with Connor. I've known Connor since he was a baby and now that he's five, he usually seeks me out at that point in the service. It's such a rich experience for me to share Christ's peace in worship – with people who I realize are struggling or who I know are celebrating; with long-time members, new members and visitors; with people who have a

lifetime of memories and with those who whose lives are just beginning. When we share the peace, Jesus is there in each person. But like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we may not recognize him right away. Connor shared the peace with me; he came up for a blessing at Communion; he greeted me at the door after church. They all seemed like routine Sunday events and, while I appreciated them, I didn't recognize anything special. But then, as Connor was leaving our celebration lunch, he came to me a fourth time and said, "I love you Pastor Alan." And then my eyes were opened and I recognized my Lord. I saw Jesus in the person of a five-year-old friend, sent by God to encourage me, support me and love me. I recognized Jesus.

I visited one of our elderly members at the hospital last week. I expected that I'd be ministering to her. But as we talked, she told me about her faith and how my family and I are in her prayers every day. And I recognized Jesus in that hospital room.

Earlier this month, several homebound members shared how much the cards of our Stay in Touch Team mean to them. You may not know this, but every week there are members of St. Mark who send handwritten notes to members who are homebound, sick or grieving. They do it on your behalf and in the name of Christ as a caring ministry of this congregation. Do you recognize Jesus?

Each week, we gather in this place to hear God's Word, to sing our Lord's praises, to receive Holy Communion, and to share our Savior's love. We confess that Jesus is alive. He is risen! And we believe that our risen Lord is among us – that he shares our walk, our life, our pain, our joy. But so many times, like those Emmaus disciples, we have not recognized his presence right before our eyes. And yet, our hearts have burned within us, with a longing for him to be revealed in our lives.

And so it is with all of our life together. We can exist side by side, carrying on our tasks, going to our meetings, bearing our burdens, sharing our fellowship, singing our hymns, planning our future. But unless we recognize Christ in our midst, everything else is really in vain. Our hearts will continue to burn within us until our eyes are finally opened to see Jesus in this life we share.

So today as we look at each other, let's ask God to open our eyes to recognize Jesus more and more. For Jesus Christ is risen and he lives with us, in us and through us. May God grant us the grace both to see him and to reveal him. And may others look at us and say, "We recognize Jesus."