

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
4/6/2008, Easter 3A
Luke 24:13-35

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹⁷And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad.(Luke 24:17, RSV)

We have just sung a hymn with one of the most sorrowful verses I know. I am referring to the second verse of the hymn “The Church of Christ, in Every Age.” That second verse goes this way:

Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live before they die. (LBW 433)

As I grow older, I seem to lose my nerve more and more. This notion that there are people in this world who “never live before they die” is heartbreaking. We know it is true, too true, that there are people who just do not have much of a chance in life.

I know a man who ran away from home when he was twelve years old. He is an old man now, but he still remembers those days of his youth. He ran away from home because his father was a mean drunk. His father would punch him, crack him right up side the head – a grown man punching a boy. The boy missed many a school day because he was bruised and ashamed to come to school. So he ran away from home and lived on the streets. In the winter time, he would search for hallways with radiators where he could sleep. In the summertime, he’d sleep on the roof. When the police found him, the boy said to them, “I am better off on the street. I am better off here than at home. I am not getting into trouble. My father cannot beat me. My mother meets me on the corner each day and gives me some money for food.” Well, the police knew the father and knew that he was a drunk, but they had not known that he beat his son. So, the police let the boy live on the streets. They did not take him home. But living on the streets is a hard way of life.

That’s “across the street.” And “across the world” the stories are multiplied a million fold. There are too, too many people in this world who will never live before they die. Incompetent schools, neglectful parents, disease, poverty, brutal crime: some folks just don’t have much of a chance.

Jesus is going to make it better. I know he is! We cannot read his story without reaching the blessed conclusion that if he is risen, then he is going to make things better for the people of this world.

I do not mean simply heaven. I also mean here and now. For one thing, he has *you* as his hands and his feet. Yield yourselves, then, to his ministry of compassion in this world.

And besides the ministry of compassion in this world, there is also the ministry of hope. You and I know something that is relevant to the twelve-year-old boy on the street, and to the elderly person drawing near to death, and to those who are young and in love, indeed to every person on this planet. We know that life is better than we would guess

because this world also contains Jesus. In fact, we don't really begin to live until we are able to live with the hope that as we walk toward yon village, Jesus lives to walk with us.

So, three men walk toward a village. They are all alive, putting one foot in front of the other, making progress toward Emmaus, conversing as they go. But two of them do not yet live as fully as they were meant to live. These two suppose that the third one is dead, for they had seen him crucified:

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.(Luke 24:21)

All three live. They breathe, they talk. But who is the one who is most alive among them? Let me turn the case over to St. Augustine now:

O my dear disciples, you *had* hoped, now you don't hope? / Come here, robber, give the disciples a lesson. Why have you given up hope, just because you have seen him crucified, because you've looked at him hanging there, because you have thought him weak? He was like that for the robber too, hanging on the cross beside him. The robber was sharing in his punishment but he believed straightaway and acknowledged him, while you on the other hand have forgotten he is the *author of life*! Cry out, robber, from the cross! You, a criminal, win over the saints! What did *they* say? "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel?" What did *this man* say? "Jesus, remember me, when you come in your kingdom." So you *had* hoped, had you, that it was he who would redeem Israel? O my dear disciples, if he *was* the one that was going to redeem Israel, it means you had defected [-- you had lost faith in him]. But he has reinstated you; he didn't abandon *you*. By becoming your companion on the way, he himself became for you the way.(Sermon 236A.4)

The resurrection of Jesus is about life! Easter is about life! Heretofore, our poor human raced trudged along under the shadow of death. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, through fear of death, all our lifetime we were subject to bondage:

¹⁴Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.(Hebrews 2:14-15, KJV)

But Easter is about life! Easter is about hope and joy. It is that kind of joy that led the disciples in this morning's Gospel to leave Emmaus and to hasten back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that they had met the resurrected Jesus. Their story starts in sorrow, with them standing "still, looking sad."(Luke 24:17, RSV) But now their hearts are light and their feet are light too. They hasten the seven miles back to Jerusalem. It is an ancient town, it is the end of the day, and they must walk the seven miles. They cannot simply jump into their Jeep and dash on back to the city. No, they have to walk, but the walking is easier now, because Jesus is alive. Indeed, I bet they traverse those seven miles as if flying, the going is so easy now.

Jesus had said early on the reason for his ministry:

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.(John 10:10, KJV)

That is the reason for the Easter Season now upon us: that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

And so with that father and son at the start of this sermon: they both deserve more life than they had. The father's life was diminished by his drunkenness and violence, and the twelve-year-old son's life was diminished by being the victim of his father's sin. But Jesus is resurrected and willing to walk with both of them, leading the father into a better life and encouraging the son that things shall certainly get better. "I give them eternal life," swears Jesus, "and no one shall pluck them out of my hand."(John 10:28)

Easter means that Someone lives who is true to you. All other people in your life might prove untrue, but He will not.

He has suffered, and does not want you to suffer. Do not mistreat the life or the body he has bought with a price — bought not with silver and gold, but with his own body and blood. He counts you precious. Do not count yourself less than that. Instead, walk with hope and joy with the One who is Risen and is available to walk with you, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.