

Sermon – Luke 24:13-35
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Grace Lutheran Church
3 Easter – Year A (Confirmation)
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“Were Not Our Hearts Burning within Us?”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

1. “We had hoped.” This has to be one of the most dispiriting phrases in the English language. For example, yesterday morning we spent several hours in the cold watching our boys discover the intricacies of the great game of soccer during their first practices of the year. They focused on some of the finer points of the game, such as “stop using your hands all the time,” “chase the ball, not the butterfly,” “no, you can’t have your snack until practice is over,” and, “Why are you crying?” Surely we have a future Lionel Messi and a future David Beckham on our hands! After all of that, we bundled back into one of our cars and headed for home. *We had hoped* that we would be able to sit down and warm up, eat a good lunch, and enjoy the rest of our day. *We had hoped*, but our hopes were dashed when we pulled up in front of our house and discovered that our other car had been rear ended while it was innocently parked in the street. *We had hoped*, but our hopes were cracked and crinkled like our rear bumper, and I spent the next several hours talking first to the driver of the other car who had, blessedly, left a note, then to a police officer, then to my insurance company, and finally to the insurance company of the other driver, all the while wondering just how exactly someone had managed to collide with an unmoving vehicle. *We had hoped*, but what we hoped for never materialized.
2. Of course, as car accidents go, this was the best kind. No one was hurt. We weren’t even there! Our hope for a relaxing afternoon will someday come to fruition. But what of our other closely held hopes? *We had hoped*, we might

- say, that this marriage would be fulfilling and joyful, but it no longer is. *We had hoped*, we might say, that this choice of career or college would be the perfect fit, but now we feel trapped. *We had hoped*, we might say, that the cancer would stay in remission, but now it has returned with a vengeance. *We had hoped*, and now our hopes have been dashed. What then?
3. *We had hoped*. These are the words on the lips of the disciple Cleopas as he and his unnamed friend trudge the seven-mile road from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the third day since their friend Jesus had been crucified and buried. "We had hoped," he says, "that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel." But that hope is gone, God's plan seemingly thwarted on the stark cross outside the city gates of Jerusalem. Without hope, they make the sad journey to Emmaus, which as Frederick Buechner has noted, is simply the "place we go in order to escape...wherever it is we throw up our hands and say, 'let the whole thing go hang. It makes no difference anyway.'" *We had hoped*, but no more.
 4. Amazingly, it is to the risen Christ that Cleopas speaks of his hopelessness, for he and his friend are unable to see Jesus for who he is, prevented from recognizing him. Blinded by their fear, their grief, and their certainty that dead people stay dead, they simply do not recognize Jesus. Still, they invite, even urge, this stranger to join them for dinner. **And then, bread:** blessed, broken, and given. In the meal of faith they receive Jesus; receiving Jesus, they see. In that moment, the Jesus they had not recognized disappears, but now in his physical absence, they will never stop seeing him. Christ is alive, and hope returns. They have feasted on the bread of life and now no journey, whether it's seven miles or seven hundred, will ever be hopeless again.
 5. It is no easy thing to have our eyes opened to the presence of Jesus, alive and at work in our lives. The journey is long; hopes come and go. And yet Jesus walks with us, feeds us, gives us his Word, and restores us to hope; and with

hope, faith and love. Today we give thanks as we celebrate the journey Jesus is making with our ten confirmands, who will soon stand in front of this august assembly. They will be asked, “Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism,” and they will respond, “I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.” I know they’ll say that because it’s printed in the bulletin; they have no choice!

6. But they will also speak these words because they’ve experienced the presence of Jesus along the roads of their lives. They are old enough, wise enough, to know that faith is not always an easy thing. Questions arise and doubts linger. I would love to share words from each of our confirmands, but time won’t allow it; I do encourage you to pick up a copy of their Witness Statements. Still, I want to share a few of their insights. In her beautiful, honest witness statement, Annika writes of the challenge of reconciling faith with reason and science. She writes, “This conflict of two different ideas made my faith journey harder since I never knew where I really stood. I thought going to church more would grant me more control over faith, but it never did. I also tried completely ignoring everything they said in church.” This last, by the way, is a statement to which I’m sure many of you can relate! She goes on, “I learned to accept that some disbelief was normal. I learned that I don’t have control on where my faith journey will end (but that) even if the ending is something much different than what I originally imagined, I know that it will still be rewarding.” Sophia writes that she has doubted whether or not “God is really present in our everyday lives,” but goes on to say, “I think I have a fairly strong faith and I’m excited to start a new chapter of it – bumps and all.”
7. Yes, bumps and all. Doubts and questions. Our inability to see Jesus when it seems that our hopes are dashed. That is the journey of faith, of life, but the promise this day – for our confirmands and for each of us – is that we are not alone on the journey. We travel together, and Jesus walks with us. He leads

us, over and over again, to the bread of life that is blessed, broken, and given for you. Bread that brings with it the promise of the One who once was dead but is dead no longer, the promise that when we hopelessly throw up our empty hands, we find those same hands filled with the very presence of Jesus. The Jesus who not only brings new life on the other side of the grave, but who also has power to bring joy and reconciliation to dulled relationships, who can open up new roads when all we see are walls, who can create healing in our hearts and souls through his presence, even if the doctors are out of options. For this Jesus is alive in us; the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been poured out upon us. God is walking with us – not just to Emmaus, but to hope itself.

8. Another confirmand, Gretchen, writes: “Jesus will be there to push back the darkness, and the darkness shall never overcome the true Light of the World.” And, finally, a thought from Max, who has clearly been listening to my sermons as evidenced by his thoughts on *Star Wars*: “The reason why the Rebellion won was not just because of the good guys, it was because they had hope.” Absolutely right, Max. In Christ, we are no longer people who **had** hoped. We are people **of** hope. So, my friends; Sophia, Gretchen, Austin, Annika, Jessica, Maximilian, Hannah, Oliver, Lila, and Evan: Keep walking the journey, and know that you don’t walk alone. We at Grace love you and, even more, Jesus himself journeys with you, through all of your doubts and fears, leading you always back to the table, always back to himself, never letting you go. You have been baptized. You will be fed. Were not our hearts burning within us? Yes, for your heart is burning with the fire of the poured-out Holy Spirit. Christ is alive and, even when all seems lost, our hope is alive forever in him. So walk now, together. Help each other see Jesus as he breaks himself open for you every step of the way. Amen.

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