Sermon – Luke 24:13-35
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Grace Lutheran Church
3 Easter – Year A
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"Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes"

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

Friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The beginning of youth baseball season is a time for hope. The inevitable disappointments that come with a game in which failing seventy percent of the time looks like success have not yet begun to pile up. The weeks-long and ultimately fruitless attempt to get dirt and grass stains out of white baseball pants has not yet proved impossible. Why *are* baseball pants white? So it was with hopeful hearts that we were on the road to Midlothian just after 6:00 a.m. yesterday morning. The hope lasted for most of the thirty-two miles, only to be pulled out from under us when we were almost there. My phone dinged. Word had just come down that the fields were officially too wet from the overnight rains. All games were postponed until further notice. With disappointment, I turned the car around and we retraced our route. The scenery was the same but everything else had changed. Upon returning home, I posted about this on Facebook. As one does. On the plus side, I got to go back to bed. Not long after waking, I read an email from one of you suggesting I work this into my Emmaus sermon for today. So, here you go. I take requests! We're in this together! The way we see the road depends upon the hope that is, or isn't, in our hearts.

2. My "road to Midlothian" experience is, of course, the inverse of the road to Emmaus experience of Cleopas and his companion. They wake on the morning of that third day without a shred of hope in their hearts. Jesus, the One in whom they'd invested their hopes for the redemption of Israel, was handed over and put to death on a cross. But the drudgeries of life must go on, so they begin their seven-mile walk to Emmaus. Along the road they are joined by a stranger, and their words to him drive home the point: "We had hoped." Their hope is a past-tense affair. It died and was laid in the tomb with Jesus. But even in hopelessness they offer hospitality. They invite Jesus in, share a meal, and, in the breaking of the bread find their eyes opened anew. The One they saw as a stranger is revealed to be the dearest One of all. Christ, impossibly, is alive. No sooner have they arrived and settled in do they get back on the road, retracing their steps with joy as they return to Jerusalem to tell of what they have seen.

3. As it always does in these resurrection stories, the opening of eyes takes a bit of time. Far from presenting themselves as those who instantly got it, the earliest witnesses of the resurrection, and those who wrote down their stories, seem all too happy to tell you that it took them a few moments. In a world where sin reigns, around us and inside us, and in which death always seems to have the last word, what could be more difficult to grasp than the resurrection? I'm reminded of the little story told of the two young fish, minding their own business, just swimming along when they are met by an older fish. Passing them, the older fish says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" The two younger fish swim on. Eventually one turns to the other and asks, "What the heck is water?" The point is simple enough. The most obvious things are often the hardest to recognize and understand. To repurpose his fish tale, we are so used to the deep waters of sin and evil and death that we don't always recognize that we're drowning in them. To imagine something different is beyond us. But it is not beyond Jesus, who not only opens our eyes but pulls us through the waters of baptism, out of death and into life. A

life in which hope is restored. A life in which peace is the hallmark of God's reign, political chatter and tomfoolery to the contrary notwithstanding.

4. If it was difficult for the first witnesses of the resurrection to see and believe, even when Jesus walked alongside them, how much harder is it for us? Perhaps this is why only one of our two disciples today gets a name. Who is the companion of Cleopas? Maybe Luke wants you to see yourself in this story, to see through the eyes and hear through the ears of the disciple as Jesus shows himself to you. Or maybe it's very much *not* you. Luke tells us so little about this disciple that it could be anyone. And isn't that just it? That the life of the resurrection is for any and all people? By long habit, most of us probably imagine that Cleopas's companion is another man. But Luke doesn't write this. She could be a woman. Perhaps this story depicts the journey of a married couple, and if Cleopas is the same person John names as Clopas, then we even know her name: Mary. Or it could be someone else entirely! Who knows? We, with new eyes, are invited to wonder, for this follower of Jesus could be any person of any gender or orientation or race age or or identity or background. In this unnamed disciple, we are invited to see ourselves, and we are invited to see each other, all welcomed and walked with by our risen Savior.

5. Today, we come together again. This world's roads are still broken, pocked and potholed by sin and suffering, violence and death. The promise of resurrection can be hard to hold. So, first, we keep doing the right thing, the loving thing, anyway. Even without hope, Cleopas and the other welcomed this person they imagined as a stranger, a migrant. Took him in. Made room at their table. We always have room for others, even for those we once imagined didn't belong, and there's bread enough to go around. And second, when we do so, Christ shows up. Makes himself present. Gives himself for us. It happens again today. Bread broken, shared. Given for you. And in the breaking of the bread, the opening of our eyes. I recently heard it pointed out

that this phrase of Luke's, "then their eyes were opened," echoes the words of the fall into sin in Genesis 3. They ate of the fruit of the tree, and then their eyes were opened. Just so, the new vision of life displaces and undoes our old vision of sin. Thanks be to God. Christ was crucified, yes, but he has been raised. Hope is forever restored, and the road need not be long or cheerless ever again. The scenery might be the same, but everything is changed. You walk together, and Jesus walks alongside. And along the way? There's always a meal to share, and there's always room for you here. The bread will soon be broken; Jesus, given for you, forever. Amen.

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

And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.