

EASTER 3, A – April 26, 2020
SCRIPTURES – Psalm 133; Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 1:17-25; Luke 24:13-35

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Luke 24

This account of an encounter with the risen Jesus on that first Easter Sunday is so fascinating. How could those two men, who had been close disciples of Jesus (the fact that they knew of the upper room where His disciples were hiding shows this), not recognize Him when He joined them? Did they have cataracts? Were they Mr. Magoo's, blind without their glasses? Had Jesus taken on a different body and appearance, as the Jehovah's Witnesses assert? It is claimed on www.jw.org:

“After his resurrection, Jesus assumed human form temporarily... The fleshly bodies that he materialized were not identical from one appearance to the next. Thus, even Jesus' close friends recognized him only by what he said or did.”

That is such nonsense! Luke doesn't say Jesus looked different, but ***“their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”*** Kept by who? By the One who made their eyes. By God!

God is in control! He has His plans and purposes! That is what we learn from this strange event. *That we learn.* This account wasn't written for Cleopas and his companion. It was written for believers who would come later; for you and me. We need to learn about God's control.

God is in control: of your world... of your life... of your days. He gives you many choices; but you do not control everything by them. God controls and directs events for His purposes and not according to your desires. This means that, as we see from Cleopas and the other disciple – and as we see even in Jesus' own life – difficult things can happen in your life... things that try your heart and test your faith... and God can seem distant at such times, not listening or responding. You'll feel alone. If you're surprised by this... why? This is taught throughout the Bible, from Genesis, its first book, to its last, Revelation. God is in control, and He sees and will judge how you respond to Him. Peter therefore urges, ***“conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.”*** (1 Pet. 1)

But (and this is such an important but): the God who is in control is the Father... your Father, for He sent His Son to be one with you... to be one for you. Those two disciples didn't realize it, but it was Jesus who was with them... and He is with you, also. ***“I am with you always,”*** He promised before He ascended into heaven. Don't doubt Him or disbelieve Him! Your Savior is with you always... in every time and every place and in every situation. And if it doesn't seem so? If you don't feel His presence, His comfort? If you are kept from recognizing Him? Well, it is because God has good purposes in mind. Chief among those purposes is, as we see in Luke 24, to drive you into His Word. Jesus led those two disciples through the Bible, and led them to see from

it that God's will was not that the Messiah save His people by being a mighty prophet but by being crucified and buried, and then rising to life again. This was how He would redeem and bring to God, not only Israel, but all people.

The more you are driven into the Bible, to search it and study it and learn from it and rely upon it, the better off you are. For, it's all about Jesus; the Jesus who, Peter says, ***"was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God."*** He came for your sake. True, He is no longer visibly among us. He hasn't been since the 40th day after Easter, when He ascended to God's right hand in heaven. Now He speaks to you and reveals Himself to you through the words of the Bible. There is where He is found. Blessed are you, then, as you search, and learn, and believe its teaching! For, you then have Jesus with you; the Jesus who does not turn His back on people who are sad and confused, even when it's because they haven't believed Him or have misunderstood Him. He comes with His truth to give you the right faith, a faith that brings confidence and joy. Then you can be like those Emmaus disciples and run to others to bring them the comfort and hope you have learned in Christ!

That is why God controls your life. That is His plan for your life here. He wants you to have His comfort and peace, that you might then be His voice of comfort and peace! So: let Him control your life! Trust Him! Trust Him by learning His Word and so learning from Him.

This is just as important today, and for you, as it was for Cleopas and his companion. They were confused and felt lost because they had been holding to the wrong idea about Jesus. ***"Jesus [was] a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,"*** they said. ***"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."*** And, He was. But it was not by might and power that He did so. By His power and might Jesus did heal people... and later, they died. By His death for our sins He took away our eternal punishment, that we might be raised to eternal life. Those two disciples didn't realize this. Why? Because they forgot Jesus' words, how He had told them that He would be rejected and killed, but would then rise from the dead. And so, when He was rejected and crucified they lost their hope.

Jesus is often looked upon and taught about the wrong way today. You know: ***"Believe in Jesus, and He will protect you from trouble. He's God, after all! Believe, and your life will get better and better."*** And then, a pandemic hits... and you suffer the same as everyone else. Your job is threatened. Your bank account dwindles. You fear that you'll get sick, and... ***"But we had hoped!"*** Had hoped? Is your hope so small – your Savior so small – that a tiny virus can crush it? That the boredom and frustration of social distancing can distract from it? That the fear of death can overcome it?

If this is the case, then you have a false theology... a false Jesus. You are believing the wrong things. That was the problem for those two disciples on Easter. Jesus had told them that He was going to be crucified and then rise, and in this way redeem Israel. But, they didn't listen. Or, they heard what they wanted to hear... they

shaped His words to match their own desires. When you do that with God's words – and that has been the devil's temptation since the Garden of Eden – then confusion, sadness, and loss of hope follow. They put you on the road to hell!

To be sure that you are on the road to heaven and are walking with Jesus, get into the Bible. Read it... study it with your fellow believers... learn and rely upon its words... because it is all about Jesus! Because it is all about His redeeming us – purchasing us for God so that we are His – by His cross.

Seeing this makes today's Gospel more than just a story about two sad disciples and how Jesus cheered them up. It's about how, because He has redeemed us, He walks with every one of us, His believers, today. He is with us especially when life's tragedies make us sad and confused, and we struggle to hold onto our hope and faith. He assures us then not only of His presence with us. He helps us to see God's control and His good will behind them. The cross and suffering do not frustrate God's plans for you, as they did not frustrate God's plans for Jesus. No, God remains in control. Through the cross and suffering He turns you from yourself and to His Son, who died and rose for you! By His words, and in the breaking of the bread, the meal of His bodily presence, Jesus your Savior is with you, and you are joined to Him.

Rejoice and be glad, then! Peter assures us (1 Pet. 1): ***“you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’”*** This is the good news that God preaches to you; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen!