



*Inset: Our potential exterior with single weekday entry*

## **“A Future with Hope: Witness”**

Third Sunday of Easter  
Sunday, April 15, 2018

All Services

Rev. Dr. Robert Driver-Bishop  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4;  
1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

Just two Sundays ago we celebrated Easter with great music and joy. Now we take time to reflect on the disciple's repose to this world changing gift from God. Last week we focused on Thomas' response to the resurrection. Personally, I think Thomas has gotten a bad rap over the years. He has been known as a “doubting” Thomas. That is unfortunate. There is nothing wrong with doubt. We could never find answers if we didn't ask questions in the first place.

Thomas messed up when he decided to handle his grief and despair all by himself. The other disciples may have been filled with fear but at least they stuck together. Today's Gospel lesson relates how the risen Lord appeared to those disciples and transformed their lives and the world

This Gospel lesson comes to us from the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke. Also, in that chapter is the story of “The Road to Emmaus”. It is a story about the way that the resurrected Christ took a journey with two lesser-known disciples. He walked with them and yet they never recognized him. Their hearts were heavy. They did not realize they were talking with the Risen Lord!

The Bible is filled with references to times when people unexpectedly encountered angels or special messengers from God.

- Abraham and Sarah entertained three heavenly travelers (Genesis 18).
- God spoke to Moses from a burning bush (Exodus 3).
- An angel appeared to Mary and announced the messiah's birth. (Luke 1: 26-38).

Cleopas and companion had left town before the Good News was announced. Tradition indicates his wife was the other disciple. Jesus reached out to the two wanderers and decided to have a little fun. He asked why they were so sad. They were amazed! They asked if he was the only person from Jerusalem who did not know what had been happening! Jesus knew it all.

It's human nature to think we have all the answers. The couple on the road to Emmaus were missing the most important part of the Easter story. They could have learned the truth from Jesus, but they weren't paying attention. They talked more than they

listened. They had also given up. They had lost hope that Jesus would return. They forgot the things he had promised. They had forgotten the promises of Scripture.

As the party reached Emmaus; Jesus indicated he was traveling further. The couple asked him to stay and be their guest. Jesus accepted the invitation. In a moment of divine irony, the guest became the host. Jesus took the bread (literally the host), he blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. In that moment they realized who he was, and then he was gone.

Previously, Jesus had used those very same words and actions when he fed the five thousand (Luke 9:16) and when he presided at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19). These four verbs (take, bless, break, give) are Jesus' holy signature. At Emmaus, the two disciples were spiritually fed.

We need to remember that the first sign of a spiritual setback is often a separation from the community of believers. Cleopas and companion chose not to remain in Jerusalem with the other disciples. They handled their loss by leaving town.

Contemporary Biblical author Frederick Buechner asserts that Emmaus is a type of place that people go to escape (shopping center, movie, nightclub, cave) when they are frustrated and cannot find answers they are seeking. Emmaus is the way of seeking worldly answers. Emmaus may promise us momentary relief but can never give us lasting joy.

The disciples who stayed in Jerusalem offered comfort to one another. Fellowships of believers are meant to read Scriptures together, share cares and concerns, break bread, and know that Christ is present. The Emmaus couple finally realized their mistake of leaving their faith community. They hurried back to join the others and share the Good News.

This week we launch a capital appeal. In many ways it will improve the facilities and help make needed changes around the church. There is also built into this appeal the possibility to expand this congregation's ministry and outreach to many who have fallen away from church. It also enables Trinity to welcome many newcomers to the faith. In effect; your gifts are a form of evangelism. This appeal is dedicated to sharing and expanding God's Good News now and into the future.

During the next few weeks there will be numerous opportunities to listen and understand the many exciting possibilities for this church. The leadership team, property committee, council, staff, finance team, and many others have worked very hard to listen and discern God's will for this ministry in this process. There is unanimous support of everyone of these dedicated people. 100% have made a prayerful and financial commitment to the appeal.

During the next couple months there will be many opportunities for these inspired leaders to share these hopes and dreams. Please come to one of these many gatherings and open yourself to God's possibilities for this fellowship of believers.

If everyone in this congregation could tithe for just one year; then many miracles could happen. In my own life, I have found tithing to be a blessing. My wife and I find that by giving "off the top" we have better discipline (related to the word disciples) with all our lives and possessions. It is truly a blessing. Whether your gift is for one year, two, or even three; make it count!

We all give because we know that God has first given to us. The experience should be shared. The church is a gift from Christ. Together:

- Jesus "takes" us to a fellowship of all believers;
- Jesus "blesses" us with a message of love;
- Jesus' message "breaks" down those things that would hold us back; and
- Jesus "gives" us back to the world to share his message of hope and salvation.

Trinity is blessed in so many ways. This is a great church. I help coordinate a network that supports the 300 largest churches in the ELCA. Trinity is in the top 1% for size. Many other churches have declines 30% to 40% in the past decade. Trinity has not. Last Christmas you had record crowds.

With great gifts come great expectations. Luke 12:48 is often translated as "to those whom much is given; much is expected" A better reading of the original Greek is "to those whom God has entrusted much; much is expected"

This congregation is blessed by mission minded pastors and members. As disciple of Christ at Trinity Lutheran in Camp Hill are truly called to be "united and empowered to worship, connect, serve!"

Please open your hearts and minds to the possibilities before this great congregation. Prayerfully consider your response. Let hope abide in your response. Let this community and the world see and hear the light and love of Jesus Christ in all that you say and do. Be a witness to all.

This little light of mine.  
I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

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