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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Easter 3
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we have just heard the story known in the Christian faith as the “The Road to Emmaus.”

And this story of the resurrected Jesus appearing to two disciples as they travel back to what is presumably their hometown...

This story is a story with which we are probably familiar.

And even though the Christian faith has come to speak of this story by the title “The Road to Emmaus.”

I would prefer to call it today “The Way to Emmaus.”

Now in Greek the word *hodos* can be translated either as “road” or “way.”

And the reason I lean toward “way” versus “road” is because the term “way” appears abundantly in the gospels.

The word “Way” surfaces again and again when we read the story of Jesus. Indeed from the very beginning of Mark’s gospel we hear this term “the Way.”

When John the Baptist appears on the scene, the scriptures state, “This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke, saying, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the Way of the Lord.’”

John is preparing the Way of the Lord.

And a little later on in Jesus' ministry, when Jesus is teaching the Sermon on the Mount, he says, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the Way is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. But the gate is narrow and the Way is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

And further on in Jesus ministry, when Jesus Feeds the Multitude, he tells the disciples, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the Way."

And later, when Jesus is speaking with his disciples about his departure, Thomas responds to Jesus' cryptic message about going to prepare a place for them.

Thomas says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going? How can we know the Way?" And Jesus responds, saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

And when Jesus sets his sight toward his fate in Jerusalem, when Jesus is on the Way toward his suffering and death, his disciples begin arguing, to which Jesus says, "What are you arguing about on the Way?"

And on Palm Sunday as Jesus is making his triumphant entry into the Holy City, the Scriptures say, "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the Way, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the Way."

And when the Pharisees and Herodians attempt to entrap Jesus, they begin by flattering Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and that you teach the Way of God. Tell us, then, it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?"

Yes, that term "the Way" appears repeatedly throughout the Scriptures.

The term comes up over and over again in the story of Jesus, and there is a reason for it.

There is a reason, Sisters and Brothers in Christ...

There is a reason why the Gospels echo over and over again this term, “the Way.”

There is a method to the Gospels’ madness.

There is a purpose for reiterating this term “the Way” such that it comes up continually .

And Friends, the reason is because this term is how early believers in Jesus spoke of the Christian faith.

In its infancy, Christianity was not called “Christianity.”

When the church was just getting started there was no such thing as a quote unquote “Christian.”

No, at the dawn of the church, Christianity was called “the Way.”

And at the dawn of the church, believers in Jesus Christ referred to themselves as the people of the Way.

Another way to describe these early believers is that they were “WAY-farers,” wayfarers, travelers along the way, journeyers along the road, pilgrims along the *hodos*.

PAUSE

Now, this term for Christianity becomes all too clear in the book of Acts in the Bible.

Yes, specifically in the book of Acts the disciples are equated with those who belonged to the Way.

When Saul, as the apostle Paul was known before his conversion experience...

When Saul was rooting out followers of Jesus, Saul sought letters of introduction so that he could go to Damascus and arrest followers of Jesus.

In Acts 9:2, it says, "Paul asked the high priest for letters of introduction to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he (Saul) found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Christians here are men and women belonging to the Way.

And with this understanding, that the Jesus movement was called the Way, we can appreciate all the more those passages in the Gospels containing the term.

Prepare the Way of the Lord.

"I am the Way, the truth, and the life."

So forth and so on.

PAUSE

Now, I don't know why the early believers decided to call their movement the Way.

Nor do I understand why the early believers called themselves the people of the Way.

My guess is that it had to do with Jesus' call to follow him.

And to follow Jesus was indeed to walk in the Way of the cross.

To follow Jesus was to choose the way of suffering and death.

To follow Jesus was to choose the way of sacrificial living.

To follow Jesus was to choose the way of servanthood, like the Lord Jesus, who came to serve, and not to be served.

This is what I would guess is the meaning behind the Way.

PAUSE

But speaking of the Christian movement as the Way conveys something else.

The Way implies action. It implies mobility.

The Way implies that God's people are on-the-go, that the Gospel is meant to be shared out into the world.

The Way implies that work of the Gospel is not stagnant, but it is active and mobile, and decidedly changing the world.

And to speak of the Jesus movement as the Way conveys something else as well.

To speak of the Jesus movement as the Way conveys hope.

For instance, to say the words, "No way," means there is no possibility, that there is no hope.

To the contrary, when we say, "Yes way," we mean there is hope, there is promise, there is possibility.

The Way conveys a sense of hope.

Where there is a will there is a way.

Where there is faith there is a way.

Where there is God there is a way.

The way is the hope, it is the road to the future, it is the path to promise.

And so, we might pose the question like this, "What is the way forward?"

What is our hope?

What is the way, for instance, for the world to be restored to fullness of life?

What is the path through this pandemic?

What is the proverbial road?

What is the vision of hope?

And it is this question more than any other, with which we are grappling as a human family.

It is this dilemma that we are staring down.

What does the road look like?

What is the way forward? What is our vision of hope for the future?

And it is going to take some time for us as a human family to sort that out.

Yes, the human family may be adrift for a while until we can get a better sense of the way.

PAUSE

In the present, however, it feels like the whole human race is walking along with those two disciples on the way to Emmaus.

Doesn't it feel like that, sisters and brothers in Christ?

Doesn't it feel like we are keeping company with Cleopas and the other disciple, walking along, looking sad and standing still?

Doesn't it feel like that?

Doesn't it feel like we are hardly moving, too weighed down by this great grief for the pleasantness of life we once knew?

Doesn't it feel like we are mourning right alongside those two disciples?

Doesn't it feel like all the emotion of the world's population could be captured in the emotion of those two hopeless disciples, who are inching their way to some uncertain future?

Yes, the road we are on, the way we are traversing seems dim and dark right about now.

And we don't know where the way forward leads.

But then...

But then, to the great surprise of those two disciples, Jesus shows up. And Jesus is suddenly walking along the way with those two disciples, only they don't recognize him.

They don't recognize Jesus even though he is right there with them.

And I wonder sometimes, if we truly realize that Jesus is right here with us on this road we are navigating through this pandemic.

I wonder if we truly realize that Jesus is accompanying us on our path.

Now, it might be, that like those two disciples on the way to Emmaus...

It might be, like those two disciples, that we will come to truly see the Lord only after the fact.

It might be that only after we have come out on the other side of this pandemic that we will say "Were not our hearts burning within us when we were on the path?"

Was not our hope rekindled as we made our way?

Was not our vision for the future alight with a fire, even while we travelled the road?

Did we not feel the very presence of God with us when we stared the pandemic in the face?

Yes, maybe, only after, will we see the light.

But, I am here to tell you, Friends, that Christ Jesus is on the road with us right now.

I am here to tell you that Jesus has already sidled up next to us.

I am here to tell you the Lord is at present revealing his power of new life to the human family.

You and I have seen the Lord already...

In the healthcare workers, who are caring for the sick and dying...

You and I have seen the Lord already...

In the food store employees, who are working hard to make available the food we eat...

You and I have seen the Lord already...

In the government officials, who are managing this crisis, and making those all too difficult decisions for the well-being of our society...

Yes, you and I have seen the Lord already...

In the news outlets working diligently to keep us up-to-date on the latest information...

Yes, you and I have seen the Lord already...

In the individuals who have generously given of their resources and volunteered for the sake of others...

Yes, you and I have seen the Lord already...

Yes, you and I, sisters and brothers in Christ, you and I have seen the Lord. He is on the way with us.

Yes, you and I have seen the Lord, and so the way is filled with hope, the way is filled with promise.

Yes, you and I have seen the Lord, and so the way does lead to life, because Jesus is the Way, the truth, and the life.

Yes, sisters and brothers, you and I have seen the Lord.

And so that way that goes to Emmaus, that way that leads through Harrisburg, that way that goes before you wherever you are in your life right now...your road, our road, the road for the whole world leads, leads to the promise resurrection.

That is the road to Emmaus, it is the way of salvation and new life.

Because Christ...because Christ Jesus is on the road, because Jesus is travelling the way with us, we are on a glorious road of the most certain promise.

That I can assure you. And to that we say "Thanks be to God." Amen.