

King of Glory Lutheran Church

August 21/22, 2021

We Are The Church - Fellowship: Luke 24:13-35

Rev. Debra Abbott

Luke 24:13-35

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This has been a heavy week. Last Saturday a massive earthquake hit Haiti killing thousands. Last Sunday the people of Afghanistan and the world woke up to find the Taliban in control of Afghanistan. Images and stories of people suffering and afraid have flooded the news. And the news had already been heavy with news about the impacts of climate change, fires, floods, droughts and the rise in numbers of people suffering from COVID.

I will admit that I took a break from the news for a few days this past week because I couldn't bear it. Normally I try to be aware of things happening around the world, the country and in our local community. But some days I just have to stop reading, listening and watching stories of human suffering.

When I turned to the gospel reading chosen for this series "We Are The Church" it sounded to me exactly like the story of a couple of people trying to get away from human suffering and very bad news. Sound familiar to anyone else?

In the gospel of Luke we find the story of two people traveling on the road to Emmaus. We meet these two, Cleopas and his friend, anxious to get out of town and leave behind all that has happened in Jerusalem.

The news couldn't have been worse. Jesus had been condemned to death and crucified. Their teacher, leader, preacher, healer, and friend was dead. All of the hope they had for the future was in Jesus. And now the future seemed to have disappeared.

This weekend in our series on the church we are reflecting on fellowship.

Perhaps when you hear the word fellowship you think of coffee and donuts, catching up with friends, and people gathered together. In the church we appropriately name gathering spaces Fellowship Hall and gathering times Fellowship Hour.

But today as we reflect on fellowship as something we experience as the church I'm drawn to these two friends on the road to Emmaus. They are sharing their common experience, their fears, their grief, their confusion, their uncertainty. And that's fellowship too.

As Cleopas and his friend talk about what has happened, Jesus comes to them on the road. And they don't recognize him. They tell Jesus the story of the past few days and out of their sadness they speak of what they have lost. They share that they had hoped this Jesus was the one who would save them and change everything.

It's not hard to imagine the emotions and thoughts of those two on the road that day because it's a place we've been before. The road we walk when we are heartbroken, devastated, or disappointed. We know that heavy sinking feeling of bad news, suffering and despair. Whether it is the news of an earthquake in Haiti or a friend who is sick or a child who is anxious. We know the heaviness of difficult news that is hard to process and a future that is not what we hoped for.

And when we find ourselves faced with disappointment and heartbreak, it is hard to see anything else. Even Jesus right there with us.

Cleopas and his friend didn't expect to see Jesus. And they didn't recognize him right away. Jesus walks with them all the way to Emmaus and along the way reminds them that God is at work even in suffering and death.

When they arrived at the place they were staying there in Emmaus, the two invited Jesus to stay with them. And in this place they gather around a table and share a meal. That's fellowship too. An invitation to be together. A meal shared.

It is during this time of fellowship that the two friends recognized Jesus. They saw Jesus right in front of them as he took bread, broke it and offered a blessing. Jesus reveals himself in the most ordinary and familiar moments. On the roads we travel and the tables we gather around.

When the disciples' recognized Jesus they looked back over the last few hours and knew that Jesus was with them all along. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

They are so excited, so energized, so filled with joy that they leave Emmaus and go back to Jerusalem, back to their community, to share the good news.

In Christian fellowship we share our griefs and our joys. We find it today with Cleopas and his friend and Jesus on the road to Emmaus and around their table and in their community.

As the church we know that road, that table, that community. We as the church welcome one another to gather and experience fellowship in many ways.

Fellowship is offered through invitation and hospitality. This might be an invitation you extend to your neighbor to join a Bible study. In the past year we have learned new ways extend an invitation to participate in a class or prayer group online. Fellowship happens through invitation.

And then when that invitation is accepted, fellowship is offered through hospitality. Christian fellowship means welcoming and understanding the needs people in our community have when we gather. Fellowship happens through hospitality.

When we as the church invite and then welcome people into our community there are so many ways to experience fellowship. One of those ways is in small groups. Jesus met with small groups of people all the time. And we follow his example. It might be a quilting group or a book study, a youth group or a service opportunity.

This past week our middle school small group for girls called Girl Talk started up again after the summer break. 12 girls gathered together and shared highs and lows of this first week of school, played games and and prayed together. Fellowship happens through small groups.

The story of Cleopas and his friend meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus includes invitation and hospitality, a small group sharing their concerns and then they gathered around a table. We as the church know, just as Cleopas and his friend experienced, that Jesus comes to us in worship, prayer and table fellowship. When we gather for worship and hear God's promises and good news for us and then receive the body and blood of Jesus at his table we experience fellowship. Fellowship happens through worship and the sacraments.

When we worship together we are experiencing fellowship not only with the people we can see, but with the whole community in Christ. People worshipping online, people worshipping in other congregations, people worshipping around the world. We as the church go far beyond this congregation.

After their encounter with Jesus, Cleopas and his friend ran back to their community, to share their joy and experience fellowship. Fellowship happens through community near and far.

We are the church, experiencing fellowship through the community of Christ. Fellowship through invitation, hospitality, connections and worship. Jesus meets us in all those people and places and experiences in lost hopes, ordinary moments, celebration and always in ways that surprise us. Thanks be to God for the gift of fellowship.

Amen.