

"The Fullness of Joy"

The 3rd Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2026

Text: Luke 24:13-35

The Word of the Lord from Psalm 16:11: "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy."

I. The Road to Emmaus

It must have come as quite the shock to the two men who walk to Emmaus.

The two are walking home after the turbulent week in Jerusalem that began with Jesus' Triumphal Entry and closed with His crucifixion. The hosannas turned to calls for death, and now the shell-shocked men are headed home. Along the way, they talk to each other and try to understand all that has taken place.

And along the way, a third man joins them. It's the risen Lord, though they do not realize it is He. Jesus asks them about their conversation, and one of them – Cleopas – replies:

"Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" When Jesus asks, "What things?", they continue:

"The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

That sums up the week pretty well. That should bring the Stranger up to date and get Him with the program. Now He'll understand their grief.

But if it's commiseration or sympathy that they're hoping for, the Man's response must come as quite the shock: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And then, for the rest of the trip to Emmaus, He runs them through the Old Testament, demonstrating time and time again that all of this was God's plan of salvation. It has all gone exactly according to plan.

The trio arrives at the village, and the Stranger appears to be headed down the road, so Cleopas and his friend urge Him to stay. He consents, and they sit down to eat; and there, it is the Guest who takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them.

It is then that they recognize their risen Lord, and He vanishes from their sight.

"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" they exclaim, and then they rush back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples they have seen Jesus, risen from the dead. The disciples report a sighting, too. Indeed, having conquered sin and death and grave, the risen Lord now seeks out His people, gathers them in and gives them His peace.

Back up a moment, though. Go back to Jesus' rebuke along the road: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" It sounds harsh, but it is spoken in love. The grief and the despair that the two men feel from the crucifixion is real and crushing, but those emotions have become a terrible barrier. For these two men, they have become more real than the Lord's certain Word and promise. They have slowed down their hearts and made them foolish. How foolish? So much so that, even though the risen Savior walks with them and speaks to them, they do not recognize Him. Were it not for His patience and faithfulness, they would continue in their grief, believing that Jesus was neither the Savior nor risen from the grave. And, therefore, they would continue in unbelief and be lost.

The rebuke sounds harsh, but Jesus is warning them of grave danger. He preaches the Law against the sin of believing their eyes and their gut reactions over His Word.

But He doesn't stop there. He demonstrates from the Scriptures that the Savior was supposed to come and die on the cross for the sins of the world. In other words, He proclaims the Gospel to give them faith. He then enters the house with them and feeds them. It is then that their eyes are opened, and they recognize their Lord in the breaking of bread.

Those two men have hope and faith restored, because the Savior came to them to restore and strengthen their faith. "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy." On the road to Emmaus the path of life is revealed because the Savior was present with His people there: and in His presence is fullness of joy.

II. Fullness of Joy

We speak of this often: sin seeks to separate you from the Lord of life for eternity. To save you from sin, Jesus became flesh and went to the cross to die in your place. To bring that forgiveness to you, personally, He visits you in His Word and in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

The Lord faithfully visits His people in these means of grace, to give them forgiveness and life and salvation.

It has been this way since Pentecost, as we hear in our first lesson for the day. Peter's sermon that day is quite on point: he tells those listening that there is life to be found in Jesus Christ, who desires to visit them with grace -- so much so that He became flesh! However, rather than rejoice in the Lord and His presence with them, they preferred sin and His absence so much that they sought to get rid of Him by putting Him to death on the cross! However, He is risen from the dead and lives forever. Cut to the heart, they ask, "What shall we do?" Note carefully what Peter says, and what follows.

Peter says, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." He tells them to be baptized -- not because this is their act of deciding for Jesus, but because Jesus is present in Baptism. As we know from Romans 6, in Baptism He joins us to His death and resurrection. There, in Baptism, is fullness of joy.

Three thousand are baptized that day, and then read what happens next: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." They continued in the apostles' doctrine; and since the apostles spoke the Word of the Lord, it means they continued in God's holy Word. They continued in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread -- an early term for Holy Communion. Why did they continue in these things? Because that is how Christ now comes to be with them, to give them forgiveness and life and salvation.

Word and Sacrament. That is how the Lord comes to you to give you forgiveness and life and salvation.

It's worth noting that, once the wind and the tongues of fire have disappeared from Pentecost, it's the means of grace that remain. For a while, it was common to hear among church folks that we must leave behind our rituals and get back to the worship of the early church. But what is more like the early church than being baptized, and then continuing to hear the Word and receive the Supper? By these means of grace, the Lord is present with you until He returns in glory -- and in His presence is fullness of joy.

That is your comfort and your hope through trial and sickness and deathbed: the Lord who died and is risen will not forsake you, but visits you. He forgives your sins and strengthens your faith so that He might raise you from the dead, into His glorious presence, forever.

This, then, is the life of the Christian most simply stated: as you go about your life in this sinful world, doing the things that God has given you to do, sin seeks to separate you from the Lord and His blessings of forgiveness and life. But the Lord visits you on **your** road to Emmaus. You rejoice to hear His Word of Gospel. You cling to your Baptism and say, "That's where God adopted me! That's where He promised, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' to me!" And you rejoice to make your way to the Lord's Supper often, because Jesus will visit you again with His body and blood to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith.

You do this by faith, by His grace, because you also heed His warnings about sin. You know that you're made of the same sinful flesh as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. You understand that, sooner or later, some crushing trial will come; and you know that, if not bolstered by His Word and Sacraments, your grief will seem far more real and powerful than your Lord. If that is the case, you may even believe that Jesus is not risen from the dead...or at least not risen for you. That's why you rejoice to have your Lord walk with you by His means of grace even now: it is far better to be alive and strong before such trial attacks than to try to become alive and strong after it's already trying to kill you.

And this determines worship in simple terms, too: our worship service is about nothing else but the Lord Jesus visiting you in His means of grace. As surely and really as He walked with those men on the road to Emmaus, rebuking their sin and giving them grace, so also He visits you by Word and Sacrament to do the same. By His Law, He rebukes you to warn you from anything, any sin, that would seduce you away from His presence and life; and by His Gospel, He renews that life in you.

Therefore, we take care to submit to our Lord and let nothing interfere with His visitation to us. But the temptations are many.

As the men who walked to Emmaus allowed their grief to interpret the cross instead of God's Word, so also we will be tempted to allow our emotions to dictate doctrine. If we are happy and joyful, then we

will believe God is near and His Word is good. If we are sad or beaten-down, then we will believe He is far away or the preaching has the wrong message. As the men on the road to Emmaus drew the wrong conclusions because they ignored the Scriptures, so we also will be tempted to reach the wrong conclusions because we see other things as more pressing than faithfulness to the Lord. Other teachings and practices will seem right because they appear effective or relevant; they may seem justifiable because other churches are doing them elsewhere.

Dear friends, in keeping with our Lord's Word, we do not determine our doctrine and practice by our emotions or works of other people. We do so by God's Word. In this case, especially, all that we do is to make sure that the Lord is present with us, for this is very good news.

Consider a small child who has fallen and skinned his knee, screaming from the pain. He might be thrashing in pain or anger. At such times, he will not be in much of a mood to communicate; and at such times, he will not be particularly pleasant to hold onto. About all that a parent can do is hold onto the child, endure the screams and wait for the child to grow calm. This is my point: no matter the mood of the child, the parent is still there with real arms to hold and real security to provide.

So it is with your Savior: in His means of grace, no matter your state of mind, He is present with forgiveness and peace.

Consider the person who suffers from terminal disease. It is said that, for those who have accepted that death is near, one of their greatest fears is that they will die alone. At such times, even though they cannot prevent death, it is a great service for close friends and loved ones to attend to them, speak to them, assure them that they are not alone. Sadly, many people today are dying without the presence of their loved ones. That's a terrible reality. That's why the presence of the Lord is so important at that time. Because even when you face death, He continues to visit you with grace and life. That's when God's Word is so important, as you remember Bible passages that you learned as a child, stories from Scripture about God's mighty works, parts of the catechism, or hymn verse. In all these God is speaking His Word of grace to you. He is present with you.

Your Savior visits you even now, as you hear this sermon. He comes to cast away your fears and doubts, to cleanse you of sin, to give you eternal life. He must speak His rebuke of Law to warn you of those sins that would remove you from Him, but only so that He might speak His saving, life-giving Gospel to you. Rejoice! The Lord is present with you as he was with the disciples on the road, and in His presence is fullness of joy-because you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.