

Christ is Risen! I have been making my way this year through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. We opened the service by reading Luke's account of the resurrection, and now we are going to look at Luke 24:13-35, a story of an interaction that two disciples had with the risen Jesus.

**Luke 24:13–35** - Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup> He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, **their faces downcast**. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” <sup>19</sup> “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was **going to redeem Israel**. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” <sup>25</sup> He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets **have spoken!** <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. <sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, “**Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.**” So he went in **to stay with them**. <sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” <sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has **appeared to Simon.**” <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

For those who cheer for UConn basketball, this has been a truly memorable week. Last Sunday, Braylon Mullins hit a last second shot to cap a 19-point comeback to defeat their archrival, the Duke Blue Devils, and send the team to another Final Four. Now, I am sure that many of you could not care less about men's college basketball. And for good reason – after all, it's just a game, and there is no reason that an 18-year-old throwing an orange ball into a hoop with a net should matter as much as it does, especially in a world where there are wars and oppression and real despair. And yet that shot and win caused grown men to cry and adults to shout and jump like children and strangers to hug each other with glee. But as a pastor, this phenomenon causes me to step back and ask why? What is it about a shot in a college basketball game that would cause grown people to react like that?

I think the author who helps us to best understand this element of humanity is J.R.R. Tolkien, the creator of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien wrote an essay called “On Fairy Stories” where he made observations about how we are drawn to stories with certain elements: a world where good triumphs over evil, where victory is snatched out of the jaws of defeat, where an act of sacrificial heroism saves the day, where death is not the end, and love is eternal. Most of the top-grossing movies, movies like *Avatar*, *Avengers*, *Titanic*, *Harry Potter*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, and yes, *Lord of the Rings*, share many of these elements in their story. We know the stories are fictional, of course, but they are so well-told that we get drawn in. **The reason, Tolkien says, is that we are both made in the image of God and fallen**. Because we are fallen, we know at the fact level that we all have to die, that evil often triumphs, that not all love relationships last, that eventually you will lose people you love. But underneath all of that, we feel that we're not meant to die, we should not lose our loved ones, and that good should triumph over evil. And so, when we see movies and read stories such as the ones listed above, and when some of us experience incredible sports endings, it touches a longing, a desire deep inside of us, the desire for a world where good triumphs, death is conquered, and love is eternal. Deep down, there is this longing for the world to be like the stories we see on the big screen. But, Tolkien says, we dare not believe that they could be true.

In those top-grossing movies, the world is often a mess, just like ours, and pain is also very real, but those movies contain what Tolkien called a **eucatastrophe** – a sudden joyous turn. As he put it, “it is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the “turn” comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar

quality.” Defeat seems certain, and then all of a sudden victory comes. Gandalf is alive. Darth Vader turns on the emperor. ET makes the bike fly.

This is why I believe that something as stupid as a kid throwing a ball through a hoop can reduce grown men to tears, because I believe it is a real-life eucatastrophe that touches this deep longing within us for good to triumph over evil, for victory to be snatched out of the jaws of defeat.

But again, that’s nice, but unfortunately the world is not like that.

**But what if the stories were true?** What if those stories, even though they are fictional, point to a deeper reality that is true, more real than the gritty reality which we see with our eyes? What if good really will triumph over evil? What if, when all seems lost, victory will be snatched out of the jaws of defeat? What if an act of sacrificial heroism really will save the day? What if death is not the end, and love is eternal? What if there is a happy ever after? **What if that beautiful reality is actually more real than the tragic reality that we see with our eyes?**

**Tolkien was a Christian, and in his essay *On Fairy Stories*, he writes that there is a story to which all the other stories point. A story that is not just legend, but history; the ultimate fairy-story breaking into history.** Not just one more inspiring story, but the true, historical story that makes sense of all the other stories. That story, he says, is the story of Easter. As Tolkien said about the Easter story: *“There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits.”*

The Easter story is the true, historical story of good triumphing decisively over evil. The story of victory snatched out of the jaws of defeat. It is the tale of an act of sacrificial heroism that saves the day. It shows once and for all that death is not the end, that love is eternal, and that there really is a happy ever after.

**This morning we read the account of Jesus’ resurrection from Luke.** There were four gospel writers – Matthew the tax collector, John the beloved disciple, Mark the travelling companion of Peter, and Luke, the travelling companion of Paul. Luke was both a physician and a very meticulous historian, who wrote both Luke and Acts:

**Luke 1:1–4** - Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I

myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

In this passage we have two disciples walking on the road to a place called Emmaus. In verses 15-16, we read that Jesus comes and walks alongside them, but they are kept from recognizing him. And their faces are downcast. They are despondent. **I can see three reasons for their despondency, three barriers to their belief.** They had expectations and hopes that Jesus would rescue them from Roman oppression, but that did not happen.

**Luke 24:19-21** - “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

And then there is the **supernatural barrier**: even though there are rumors that Jesus is no longer in the tomb, they know that dead men don't rise from the grave.

Many of you, or many people in your life, are in similar circumstances. You may have given up faith and hope because you had expectations on what God should be like or how he should act that he did not meet. **The most common time this happens in our lives is when something bad happens.** Someone we love dies. The disease or illness we are praying God to heal doesn't go away. The marriage doesn't turn around. We lose the job, and then our house. Prayers go unanswered. And we don't understand how a good God could allow those things to happen, and we lose our faith in God. **The expectations we place on God, especially when He doesn't meet those expectations, can be a big barrier to belief.**

Or maybe you can't bring yourself to believe that something supernatural - a man raised from the dead - might really be true.

But here is the thing. Sometimes people are guilty of what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery,” believing that we are superior to people 2000 years ago because they were supposedly unscientific and gullible back then. But the reality is that people in Jesus' day were just as unlikely to believe in the resurrection as we are today. After all, most **Jews** believed in a future general resurrection of the righteous, all together at the last day; but they did not believe that an individual would rise from the dead in the middle of history. Not to mention that the disciples

began worshiping Jesus as divine, the eternal Son of God, something that would have been blasphemous to any good Jew who believed that there was no God apart from Yahweh. And what about the non-Jewish culture around them? The Greeks did not believe in a bodily resurrection; for them, the afterlife was liberation of the soul from the body. They believed that the body was corrupt, so who would want to be resurrected and trapped in a body for all eternity? Resurrection was undesirable for the Greeks. So, just in case you thought people might more readily believe in miracles such as the resurrection 2000 years ago, they didn't.

**1 Corinthians 1:23–24** - But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This means that if the disciples had made up the resurrection story, no one would have believed them. But they did not make it up, and it really happened. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus has so much evidence in its favor – the eyewitness testimony - there were still eyewitnesses when Paul was writing his letters (see 1 Corinthians 15:6, or notice the reference to Cleopas). The missing body – the body was never produced as evidence that he was dead. The dead Messiahs – there were others around the time who claimed to be Messiahs, and when they died, their fame died with them – not so with Jesus. The transformed disciples – the disciples were transformed into men who were willing to die rather than say it was a lie. The portrayal of the male and female disciples - And look at how the disciples, the leaders in the early church, are portrayed as idiots, deserters, Christ-deniers, while on the other hand, the first eyewitnesses were women, whose testimony wasn't even valid in a courtroom. If this story were made up, this would never have been the case.

The truth is that God is real and Jesus is risen and His presence is all around us. But the third barrier is that they were kept from recognizing Jesus. The Bible tells us that there is a hiddenness barrier, that just like the disciples, God may be all around us, walking besides us, so to speak, and yet we are kept from recognizing His reality.

**2 Corinthians 4:3–4** - And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup>The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

That is kind of frightening. According to Paul, for those who do not believe, it is as if Satan, the god of this age, has blinded their minds, as if they have a veil over their hearts and minds that will not allow them to understand and see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. **This is true for some of you sitting here right now.** Some of you listen to me talk, you watch people raising their hands in worship, and you say, “I don’t get it.” Or worse, you scoff inwardly at them, wondering how anyone could be so gullible. The reason, according to the Bible, is not that you are somehow stupid, or that those who believe are stupid. The reason is that there is a veil, metaphorically speaking, that has blinded you from seeing the glory of the gospel, from seeing the beauty of Christ, from truly comprehending the love of God.

**2 Corinthians 3:16** - But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

For some, the veil has been lifted and they see the glory of the gospel. For others, the veil remains.

As someone who stands firmly on the believer side, but who used to be on the other side of not knowing Jesus, **I can say confidently that there truly is a hiddenness barrier.** I became a believer in Jesus at 18. While I did not feel different immediately when I prayed to Him, I could see some clear differences in the following days. The Bible, which had formerly been boring and meaningless, came alive, and I wanted to read the Bible. Not only so, but it started to make sense for the first time, and to speak into my life. I found myself wanting to read as many books about God as I could and to learn as much as I could about God. I wanted to spend time with other Christians, which was also new. I had a sensitivity to sin that was not there before. And nobody taught me these things – it was as if God had lifted a veil, and I was seeing the world in a whole new light, with new eyes. And when I look at my life today, I can not explain the love I feel for God with my reason. It makes no logical sense to feel that emotionally for a being I have never seen. I can not explain the joy I have in knowing God, other than to say that God has lifted the veil and allowed me to see His glorious gospel.

It is just as the blind man who was healed by Jesus said in **John 9:25** when asked by the religious leaders about how Jesus healed him: “One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see.”

Do you see God? Have you seen the glory of the gospel, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for your sins? Or is the veil still there? Listen to how Paul prayed:

**Ephesians 1:17–19** - I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

But as Jesus tells them the story of Scripture and how everything points to him, their hearts begin to burn within them.

Imagine how the Jesus in disguise would have led them through the Scriptures to show them how it all pointed to Him:

Remember **Adam**, who failed the test of obedience in the garden of Eden and passed down the curse of his disobedience to us? Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed the test of obedience in the garden of Gethsemane and who passes down the blessing of his obedience to us

Remember after Adam and Eve fell into sin, how God told them that the **serpent** would bruise the heel of the woman's descendant but that he would crush the serpent's head? That descendant is Jesus, who though bruised, will crush the Devil forever.

Remember **Abel**, slain by his brother Cain even though he was innocent, and how his blood cried out for condemnation? Jesus is the true and better Abel, who was also slain even though he was innocent, and whose blood cries out for our acquittal.

Remember **Abraham**, who answered the call of God and left the comfortable and familiar to go to a new place to create a new people of God? Jesus is the true and better Abraham, who left the comfort of heaven to come to earth and create a new people of God.

Remember **God's covenant with Abraham**, where he cut the pieces of the animals and passed between them, declaring that I will not fail you, and even if you fail, I will take the penalty for your sin? Jesus is God taking that penalty for our failures.

Remember **Isaac**, Abraham's son, offered up by his father on the mount but saved by God? Jesus is the true and better Isaac, offered up by his father on the mountain and sacrificed for us all.

Remember **Jacob**, asleep in the middle of nowhere, dreaming of a stairway to heaven? Jesus is that stairway to heaven. Jesus is heaven come to earth and is the way that we get to heaven.

Remember **Jacob**, wrestling with God and taking the blow of justice? Jesus is the true and better Jacob, who took the Father's fatal blow of justice that we deserved so that we might receive grace

Remember **Joseph**, ascended to the right hand of the king of Egypt, forgiving those who betrayed him and using his power to save them and the people of God? Jesus is the true and better Joseph, ascended to the right hand of God the King, forgiving those who betrayed him and using His power to save Him.

We're only in Genesis!

What about **Moses**, standing in the gap between the people and the Lord, mediating a new covenant? Jesus is the true and better Moses, standing in the gap between the people and the Lord and mediating a new covenant.

What about the **Rock of Moses**, struck with the rod of God's justice to give the people water in the desert? Jesus is the true and better Rock, struck with the rod of God's justice to give the people living water

What about the **Passover Lamb**, innocent and slain so that the angel of death would pass over the people of God? Jesus is the true Lamb of God, innocent and slain so that the angel of death would pass over us.

What about the **manna**, bread from heaven given by God so that His people might live? Jesus is the true bread from heaven, come down to give us His body so that we might have eternal life.

What about the **tabernacle**, the temple, God dwelling in the midst of His people? Christ is the true temple, Emmanuel, God dwelling with us.

What about **Job**, the innocent sufferer who intercedes for and saves his foolish friends? Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer who intercedes for and saves us.

What about **David**, whose victory over Goliath becomes his people's victory, even though they never lifted a stone? Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory over Satan and death becomes our victory, even though we did nothing to deserve it.

What about God's prophecy that one of **David's descendants** would sit on the throne forever? Jesus is that descendant, reigning over an eternal kingdom.

What about **Psalms 22**, the Psalmist crying out "My God my God, why have you forsaken me" as evil men encircle him and pierce his hands and feet and cast lots for his clothing? Jesus is that man, crying out from the cross as He takes on our sins and as His Father turns His back.

What about **Esther**, who risked the palace in order to save her people? Jesus is the true and better Esther, who gave up His heavenly palace and didn't just risk his life but gave it to save his people

What about **Jonah**, thrown out into the storm, three days in the belly of the great fish before being brought back up, so that the other sailors might be saved? Jesus is the true and greater Jonah, thrown out into the storm of God's justice, three days in the grave before rising again, so that we might be saved

What about **Daniel**, seeing a vision of a Son of Man who will be given authority by the eternal Father to rule over the nations? Jesus is that Son of Man.

What about **the son who will be born**, prophesied by Isaiah, who will carry on his shoulders the governments of this world, whose name will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace? What about the one of whom Isaiah writes that **the virgin will conceive** and be with child, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us? What about the prophecy in **Micah** that a child will be born in Bethlehem who will be ruler over Israel, but whose origins will be from ancient times? What about the **suffering servant** of Isaiah 53 who will die for the sins of the nation?

The Bible is not a collection of stories, or worse, a collection of inspirational sayings. It is one grand story, for those who have ears to hear, telling the story of the love of God as displayed in the person of Jesus, come to suffer and die and rise again to save those who are lost and to bring them back to God. **It's like Sixth Sense or Usual Suspects**, one of those movies where the ending changes the way you saw everything that came before. As the disciples heard the risen Jesus talk about how all that came before pointed to Him, Luke writes that their hearts burned within them. All the stories point to him and find their culmination in Him! That is the wonder of the Bible.

As Tolkien wrote, the longings of your heart are met in Jesus. The stories come true in Him. Easter is the true story to which all of the stories point.

As the disciples heard Jesus talk, their hearts were burning within them. How did you feel as I showed you how all the stories point to Easter and find their fulfillment here? What went through your mind and heart as I claimed that we love the stories that we love because they point us to the true story of the resurrection? Do you truly believe that **good will triumph over evil, that victory has been snatched out of the jaws of defeat, that an act of sacrificial heroism has saved the day, that death is not the end, that love is eternal, and that there is a happy ever after?**

Could it really be true? Despite all the evil and discouragement that comes from living in this world, could that all be true? I believe that we long for all of this to be true because our hearts recognize that this is what we were created for.

**Ecclesiastes 3:11** - He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

**Think about it. When you come to a funeral**, when a loved one dies, do you find yourself at peace with that being the end? Or does something inside you rage against it? Do you know deep down that death is wrong, that it was never meant to be this way? Do you long for life beyond the grave, for reunion, for death to not have the final word? That longing in your heart is not an accident. It is there because he has set eternity in your hearts. You are longing for God, for Jesus, for the glory of the gospel, for life as God intended it to be.

As Jesus put it in **John 11:25–26** - Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

The longing is there, and it is for life as God intended it. Jesus declares that the grave is not the end, that love does last forever for those who are in Him, and he proves this to be true by rising from the dead.

But that is not the only longing in there. **There is also the longing for justice**, that good would decisively triumph over evil once and for all, that there would be no more suffering, that all would be made right. Every time we are faced with the injustice of this world, we can either become callous or we can recognize the longing inside of us that things would be made right. And because of the resurrection, that longing will also be fulfilled:

**Revelation 21:1–5** - Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed

away.”<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

What else do we long for? **We long to live a life that matters, to know that there is a purpose to this difficult life that we live**, that it’s not just a miserable, meaningless existence. We long for our lives to have meaning because we were meant to live a meaningful life. We were meant to know God and glorify and enjoy Him forever. We were meant to be a part of his mission to bring this world back to Him and to the way it was meant to be. This is why, in Paul’s great chapter on the resurrection, he writes:

**1 Corinthians 15:58** - Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Because of the resurrection, everything matters. As Jesus put it:

**Matthew 10:42** – “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

There are many other longings in our heart. And the wonder of Easter is that all of those longings – for love, for justice, for meaning, for everything else – will be met in God forever. Turn to Jesus and trust in Him today and pray for Him to lift the veil that you might see and know Him! There is hope, even in your darkest hour. **God is the God of the eucatastrophe, the God of the joyous turn.**

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus was walking with two of his followers and they did not even know it. He was there all along, hiding in plain sight. For many of you, God has been here all along, and you have simply not recognized Him. But all the stories point to Him. The burning in your hearts, the longings you feel, are because you were made for relationship with God. Your longings will not be met by the things of this world. Easter is the greatest news because it is true. There is meaning in the world. There will be justice. Death is not the end. And love will be eternal.

If you do not know Jesus, believe in Him today. As Paul writes:

**Romans 10:9–10** - If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>10</sup> For it is with

your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Through faith in Jesus, you can be saved from sin, from eternal separation from God, saved to an eternal life of love, joy, and peace. Life to the fullest is found in Jesus. Come to Him with an open heart today, and pray for Him to lift the veil so that you might see the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you do not know Jesus but would like to, you can pray something like this from your heart to His:

*Jesus, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God. I believe that in you is found eternal life, life to the full. I believe that apart from faith in you, I will die in my sins, separated from God for all eternity. But I believe that you love me so much that you died on the cross in my place, taking the penalty for my sin, and that you rose from the grave, conquering death. I turn from my sinful, self-centered way of life and I believe in you as my Savior and Lord. Amen.*