

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
All Saints' Sunday
November 2, 2025
9:30 AM

Text: Luke 24:13-27

Theme: We Believe: "In Accordance with the Scriptures"

[prayer]

Today's Gospel lesson features a famous walk in our tradition, the walk to Emmaus. In our story it is still Easter morning; Jesus's resurrection is not yet a widespread revelation. The disciples who walk this road walk it with the grief and despair of having watched their hope die on a cross. They do not immediately comprehend the appearance of the resurrected Jesus. They are victims of a deep irony – while they had hoped Jesus would fulfill the Scriptures by redeeming Israel, they saw his death as a failure, even though it was indeed the fulfillment they hoped for.

When Jesus questions the dusty travelers as to why the long faces, the disciple named Cleopas demands to know what rock he has been living under. Cleopas is aghast that Jesus does not know what has happened. Ironically, Jesus is the only one who knows the true meaning of all that has occurred, but Cleopas does not recognize his Lord. He gives Jesus a brief and frustrated summary of the events of the previous days. The words that Luke puts in Cleopas's mouth are likely a very early creedal formula: That Jesus was the Messiah, that he was put to death on a cross, and that three days later his tomb was found empty. This is the very heart of our confession as Christians: The Crucifixion and the Resurrection. And this is the very heart of the Nicene Creed, that

*On the third day [Jesus] rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

The disciples knew their scriptures, but their hearts were slow to recognize what Jesus calls “necessary” – that the Messiah had to die and then be raised to free humanity and all creation from the tyranny of sin and death. They were blinded by their expectations of what messianic victory ought to look like. And so, Jesus helped them start over. He opened the scriptures anew for them and showed his connection to the faith tradition of their past, a tradition that has always pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s plan for creation.

The reading and interpreting of Scripture is an essential part of developing our ‘spiritual sight.’ It was during a reading of Martin Luther’s preface to the Letter to the Romans that John Wesley had his encounter with the Risen Christ. He wrote about that experience: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”¹ When Wesley heard the scriptures read, his heart burned, not unlike the disciples in our story.

Luke does not say specifically which of the scriptures Jesus interpreted for the disciples, only that he began with Moses and then worked his way through all of the prophets, which would have encompassed the canon of the Hebrew scriptures at that time. As Christians, we see the story of Jesus’s death, resurrection, and ascension foretold throughout the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis when God spared Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac. God tested Abraham to do what God himself would eventually do in Jesus. And while God did not spare His only Son from death as he spared Abraham’s only son, Isaac’s survival foreshadows Jesus’s victory over death. As the Letter to the Hebrews states, “[Abraham] considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead – and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Heb 11:19 NRSVUE). The scene between Abraham and Isaac is a type of resurrection, even taking place on the third day.

Perhaps Jesus laid this ancient story bare for the disciples. Or perhaps he quoted the Prophet Hosea, who remarked that though God struck Israel down, “on the third day he will raise us up” (6:1-2). Or perhaps Jesus referenced the Prophet Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of a whale, a seeming death sentence, until the whale coughed him back up. “For just as Jonah was three days and three

¹ Journal (ed. N. Curnock) 24 May 1738

nights in the belly of the sea monster,” Jesus said, “so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40).

These are just a few of the examples from Israel’s scriptures that led Paul to confidently assert, “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures...he was buried and...he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4).

Like Jesus’s death and his birth, his resurrection and ascension were undertaken “for us and for our salvation” according to God’s divine plan. The Creed claims that God’s mighty acts in Jesus Christ were done in accordance with the scriptures precisely to underscore our belief that these events did not occur by happenstance. They were part of God’s plan from the very foundation of time.

Last week I spoke of the Creed’s insistence on the necessity of the Incarnation: That with his human body Jesus builds a bridge between us and God; that without that bridge there is no way we can be saved; that in his body nailed to the cross, all our sin and brokenness was nailed, too – assumed in Jesus’s body so we could be healed from it.

But the Crucifixion constitutes only one-third of our healing. Paul writes, “The wages that sin pays are death, but God’s gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23 CEB). Jesus assumed not only our sin, but also the consequence of our sin: Death. He died and was buried and descended into Hell.² He went to the deepest, darkest pit of our humanity – taking on death itself – so that no thing – not death or life, height or depth, powers or rulers, present things or future things – could separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38-39). The Resurrection is not just Jesus miraculously coming back to life. It is also the sign and the promise that there is nothing in creation that exists outside of the sovereignty of Christ, not even death. Jesus rose from the grave and he kept on rising, ascending into heaven where he took his seat at the Father’s right hand. And now all things, including death, have come under his authority. The Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension – these three acts combined constitute our salvation. For now we have received the assurance that there is life beyond death.

² <https://www.umc.org/en/content/apostles-creed-traditional-ecumenical>

Now at the Father's side, Jesus intercedes for us and prepares a place for us in eternity. He promised us this when he said, "In the Father's house there are many dwelling places...I go to prepare a place for you...[and] I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3 NRSVUE).

This promise of Christ's Second Coming, which we call the *Parousia*, is more than a promise of eternity spent in the presence of God. It is also the event that will usher in a new age where all of creation will be remade in the image of Eden and keep God's peace at last. In the Old Testament, this event is called the "Day of the Lord." The Prophets fervently spoke of it as both a day of judgment and divine presence. The Creed states that we believe Christ will "come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." While Christ's judgment – the sifting of the wheat from the tares, the sorting of the sheep from the goats – sounds harsh, it is in fact an act of grace in preparation for the new heaven and new earth that awaits us. Author Fleming Rutledge writes, "The overall testimony of the Old and New Testaments is that God will save us *from* the judgment, but he will not save us *without* judgment."³ The Final Judgment will be an act of grace that purifies us once and for all of the sin that stubbornly mars the image of God, so that we will be fit for God's redeemed creation.

It is a hopeful and comforting thing to know that all of this has and will be done according to God's perfect plan. The life of faith demands we put all our trust in God. This is not an easy thing to do when death still hovers close over our realities in the form of hunger, illness, poverty, war. But even though death and all his friends continue to wreak havoc, we are not afraid because we know that Jesus has already won for us the victory. There is a Presence greater than all these things ordaining the direction of creation. And so, we join with Paul in his mocking declaration, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:55). Hardship will visit us, but our salvation is secured. We are confident in the vision of a new and better world already breaking into this one.

Today, on All Saints' Sunday, as we light the candles and speak the names of those who now dwell in perpetual light, we are especially confident in the arc of redemption that the Creed affirms. We see in those who have gone before us,

³ Fleming Rutledge, "Loving the Dreadful Day of Judgment," in *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 182.

ordinary saints and sinners, a testimony of what it looks like to fight the good fight – to not give into the temptation of controlling our own destiny with power or wealth or whatever the world tells us will save us from death, but instead to trust in God’s plan and give ourselves over to Him entirely. To trust him as the captain of our fates – a fate that does not culminate in death, but in resurrection. The consummation of all things in Christ is assured, and just as Christ has gone to prepare a place for us and will come again, so will those we have loved and lost and whose memories we bless today. With them we declare that heaven is never far away from each of us and Christ’s kingdom has no end.

Amen.