

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Luke 24:13-35

Year A - Easter 3, Text: Luke 24:13-35
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In the Gospel narratives, Jesus' death and the empty tomb are unexpected and inexplicable events — especially for His disciples, including Peter, who respond in fear and disbelief. Nevertheless, the women display the needed insight, and deliver the message!

In today's narrative, the Risen Jesus focuses on interpreting the Scriptures to two disciples who finally recognize Him in the breaking of bread. In this event and those that follow, Jesus opens the Scriptures and then the eyes of His disciples and followers.

Verses 24:13-14: The Greek text refers to Emmaus being “60 stadia” from Jerusalem — about 7 miles. Other ancient authorities read “160 stadia,” or more than 18 miles. (*Stadia* is the plural form of *stadium*; a stadium was 607 feet.) The location of Emmaus is uncertain. Little wonder that the two people walking to Emmaus were talking about what had transpired in Jerusalem during the previous few days!

Verses 24:15-16: When Jesus suddenly appeared, they did not recognize Him. But then, who would have been expecting to see the crucified and buried Lord alive and well again? In this and other post-resurrection narratives, one gets the impression that the risen Jesus was somewhat different in appearance and initially unrecognizable.

Verses 24:17-21: When Jesus asks the two travelers what they had been talking about, they show surprise that He was not informed about what had taken place in Jerusalem in relation to Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial. Jesus responds with more questions. Their answers reveal that they were well informed about how Jerusalem's religious and political leaders had, three days earlier, organized events that resulted in Jesus' crucifixion and death.

The two travelers state that they, and the Jewish people generally, had been waiting for a prophet like Moses — someone mighty in deed and word, someone who would redeem Israel. (Luke presents Jesus

as having been such a figure, although in a way that was radically different from what Moses had been.) No doubt Jesus' fellow travelers were expecting that prophet, that leader, to be one who would deliver them from Roman rule and establish an independent Jewish realm resembling that which David had established.

Most likely, the travelers' hopes were also in keeping with the expectation expressed in Daniel 7. They were looking for the coming of the day when the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13) would subdue their political enemies and to rule the nations of the world forever.

Verses 24:22-24: The two travelers then share with Jesus the testimony of those women who had gone to Jesus' tomb on Easter Sunday morning — and found it empty. But there was more! A vision of angels had told those women that Jesus had returned to life! Some of those who heard the testimony of these women went to the tomb and found it empty. However, they did not see Jesus!

Verses 24:25-27: Jesus then takes over! He begins with something of a rebuke in which He refers to His fellow travelers as foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had declared. He states that it was necessary that the Messiah should suffer all these things and enter into His glory!

Jesus must have then conducted a rather lengthy Bible study along the way to Emmaus, using Moses and the Prophets when doing so. (Moses: Genesis–Deuteronomy; prophets: Joshua–2 Kings, Isaiah–Malachi) Jesus would have presented Himself as the final fulfillment of all Jewish hopes and dreams, but as a “fulfillment” radically different from what they were expecting.

Luke is the only NT writer to refer explicitly to Jesus as a “suffering Messiah.” The idea of a suffering Messiah is not found in the Old Testament or in other Jewish literature prior to the New Testament period. The Jewish people were not waiting for a savior from sin; they did not see themselves as fallen but as flawed.

They believed that they themselves could deal with the problem of sin by obeying the law codes revealed in the Pentateuch.

Verses 24:28-29: When the trio reached Emmaus, Jesus acted as though He intended to keep walking. “But they urged Him...” reflects the word compel in 14:23 (“and compel people to come in,” the parable of the Great Banquet). Jesus accepted their invitation.

Verses 24:30-35: Jesus’ actions (“took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them”) reflect the prelude to the miraculous feeding described in 9:16. The eyes of the two disciples are now opened, and they recognize Jesus, Who immediately disappears from their sight. They rush back to Jerusalem and share with the eleven disciples what they have experienced and how Jesus revealed Himself to them “in the breaking of the bread.” Their testimony is powerful.

Echoes of the Lord’s Supper

In the final verses of the story, the verbs “took, blessed, and gave” are the same words we hear regularly in our worship in the Words of Institution. Just as he did to those disciples long ago, in our celebration of Holy Communion, Christ reveals himself to us.

But in this communion (aka. community), Jesus also reveals us as his body in the world. When Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) celebrated the Eucharist, he pointed first to the sacred elements on the altar and said, “Behold, the body of Christ.” He then pointed to the worshipers present and said, “And you are the body of Christ.” Next, he invited the worshipers, “Come, eat what you are.” And finally, “Go forth to become what you eat.”

The implications of participating in the Lord’s Supper are most profound. Although some understand participation merely as an assurance that their sins have been forgiven, there is more — much more. When we participate in our Lord’s Holy Meal, millions of people around the world are sharing the same meal on the same day — and they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we are to care about and for them in ways that reflect the mind, manner, and ministry of Jesus!