

“How many times do I have to tell you?”

How many of us, in frustration, have uttered those words? At a child, or a friend, a coworker, or perhaps a spouse? It may not be the nicest thing in the world to say, it's certainly going to make the other person defensive or guilty or sad. But really! We were clear and direct in what we said and we've said it on more than one occasion, emphasized its importance and yet the other person has completely forgotten. Had to ask us about it *again* or maybe went and did exactly what we told them not to. It's ridiculous! How much more to the point could we have been?

Maybe then you've got a good idea what it was like for Jesus when he caught up with these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He joins them on the way, but by his godly power they cannot see him for who he really is. He asks them innocently enough what they're discussing on the way. The clam up, look down, perhaps fidget a little. “Don't you know what's been happening?” they ask. And feigning ignorance, they tell Jesus what they thought about him. They thought he was the one who would redeem Israel but now he was dead. Sure they heard some confusing reports about an empty tomb and women seeing him, but that must be nonsense, right? He died and because he died so did all their hopes of seeing Israel restored.

You have to wonder how Jesus doesn't just shake them both with frustration, how he doesn't just reveal himself right there and yell at them, “How many times did I tell you that this is *exactly* what was going to happen?” And he did. Over and over that he would be handed over, put to death and rise to life on the third day. But here it was, the third day after he had been handed over to death, the tomb was reported empty and these disciples are still moping about as though they can't connect the dots at all. They're miserable and depressed because they just didn't believe what they were told.

And yet, Jesus doesn't do that. He does give them a bit of well-deserve chastisement, but then he does something utterly unexpected, almost certainly different than what any of us would do in that situation. It says here, **“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”** (v25-27).

A little odd, right? I mean, he's there, he himself is the proof, and he was the one who told them what was going to happen! And yet, what he does here is far more valuable, both for these disciples and especially for us. He points them to what they already have. Moses and the Prophets means what we call the Old Testament. It's the scriptures the Jewish people used. They were the foundation of their religion. And Jesus walks them through the plan of salvation from Genesis to himself to show them the truth; that this was always the plan, from the very beginning. It was always the plan that the Savior would come and die and rise to life to save us.

Unfortunately we don't have the content of his commentary on scripture recorded for us, because that would be a real treat. But in the end it's not that big of a deal. It would be nice to hear it in Jesus' own words, but we can look for ourselves and see how God's plan of salvation has tracked from the first promise in the Garden of Eden up until Jesus himself. In fact, if you haven't seen it, our synod put out a video called *The Road to Emmaus* which offers one suggestion of what that conversation might have been like and it does a very good job tracking God's plan of salvation in the scriptures.

But that's what it's all about. Not exact content of what Jesus said to these men but where he took them to find it. To the word of God. Jesus wasn't some new thing that forced himself into the Jewish pattern of religion. He wasn't some imposter or change to their religion. He was the fulfilment of everything God had been planning all along, and it was the Law and the Prophets that proved it. If the disciples had read those writings carefully and more to the point, understood and believed what had been written there about the Messiah, then they could have spared themselves all the unnecessary grief and pain that they had been inflicting on themselves.

Would there have been sorrow on Good Friday still? Sure, but sorrow because it was their sin that put Christ on the cross. There would've been reserved joy in knowing that his death was paying for those sins and that they would be completely forgiven by this sacrifice. And hearing the news that the tomb was empty wouldn't have been some odd shock to them, rather it would have been confirming the joy they were awaiting, that they knew was coming. The grief they were going through was not necessary if only they had believed what God had told them both through the prophets and Jesus himself.

But instead they had doubted. They hadn't fully believed their God or taken him at his word. They should have been yelled at. They should've been punished for their unbelief. They should've had to do something to make up their

lack of confidence in Jesus to him. When they asked him to stay the evening with them, he should have just kept on walking. But that is not what this whole event was about.

The reason it had to be this way, the reason the Christ came at all and suffered and died on the cross was so that he could be with us. Or really, more accurately, so we could be with him. Our God is holy. He is love and justice and he is perfect. There is no stain of evil in him at all, he is the embodiment of all that is good. Sin cannot stand in his presence; sin is a divider that keeps us from him. Because we have doubted him, because we have put ourselves above him in our lives, we should not be able to approach him. We should have to be cut off from him forever. When we ask him to be with us, he ought to keep on walking.

But he died so that he might stay. Perfection is what God demands. Complete payment for sin is what God demands. And Christ came so that we could have these things. His life on our behalf makes us perfect in God's eyes. His death on the cross was the punishment due for the sins we've committed. The divide between us and our God is healed by what he accomplished on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter is the proof that it really was finished there. And now because of his work, when we say, "Stay with us, Lord," he can. We can come near to our God, no matter how unworthy we may actually be because he has *made* us worthy by his work on our behalf.

But here's where we come full circle on this. In order for us to be worthy in the Lord's sight, in order for us to have the gift of God applied to each of us, we have to know it and we have to believe it. And this is why Jesus did what he did for those disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is why it's valuable to us that he didn't just tell them what was happening but rather pointed them back to the writings of God through his prophets so that they could believe what was written there. Because that is what we have, and that is exactly what we need.

Let's be clear. Faith is not something we do. Trusting in God is not something we create for ourselves but rather something he does within us, because in our sinful selves we are the opposite of trust in God, we are only trust in ourselves. Only God has the power to change this heart within us. And he does, but he does so by his chosen means. And the primary means he uses is his word. The truth about how he has rescued us is how the Holy Spirit comes to turn our hearts from death to life. As we learn about what Jesus, we are changed so we trust in Jesus. This is the treasure that scripture is for us, this is its uniqueness. Only by the gospel in word and sacrament is our faith created and strengthened. And only by faith in Jesus are we rescued from our sin. These words are more valuable than all the material treasure of the world because only these words bring eternal life to us.

And that changes even our lives here. When we know we have eternity, the treasures of this world simply are less valuable to us. They don't mean as much. And the troubles of this world hurt a little less because they won't last. They won't follow us. And the fears of this world can be erased, because we know that God is guarding and protecting us from the worst. We know that he will always provide for us, we know that God always works everything for the good of those who love him. We know that whatever path life takes it's the necessary path to get us to that eternal kingdom with our God. And so a life lived that trusts in God, a life that believes what his prophets have spoken, that is a life that is completely free from worry and doubt and fear.

At least it ought to be, right? Oh but how often do we forget? How often do we fail to connect the dots on our own between the troubles we face and the promises God made? How often do we suffer despair or depression because we weren't paying attention to what our God has promised us? How much do we deserve to have our God swoop down and just yell at us, "How many times do I have to tell you?"

But he doesn't. Instead he comes to us patiently and gently, always pointing us back to his word and reminding us that our doubts are forgiven by Christ. Always bringing us to his word and in it building up our trust stronger and stronger so that we really do trust what he has spoken to us. A life lived with this sure trust in what God has told us is a life that is full of contentment and joy and is only looking forward to an even better life to come. But most of all it is a life that trusts when we do fail, our God will always be there to stay with us because he has forgiven us every time through the blood of Jesus.

Let a heart motivated by the love God has created in you drive you to trust him better. Live in the joy of knowing your God with an unshakeable confidence. Read the word he has given us through his prophets and believe what he has told us. Amen.