

Easter 3, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Luke 24: 13 – 35

My sermon text this morning is the Gospel lesson I just read, from Luke chapter 24. Luke by the way is the only one of the four Gospels to tell this particular story, about the day the Risen Lord appeared to two of His disciples, as they were going along the way.

The Lord be with you. And let us pray.

Lord Jesus, as the two disciples in this story were just traveling down the road, so in a way are we, and we also have our share of aches and pains and doubt and confusion. As you walked with them Lord so now walk with us. Open our eyes to your presence, open our hearts to your word, and lead us safely home. This we pray Lord Jesus, trusting always and only in your mercy,
AMEN.

Those of you of my approximate age—do you remember watching Tom and Jerry cartoons on television? Tom the cat chasing Jerry the mouse, wrecking the piano dropping an anvil from the roof, that sort of thing. Big fun, big fun. Well, sometimes on that cartoon, what would happen is that a little angel, a little angel would appear on Tom’s shoulder, right? And the angel would say “Tom! Tom Cat! Why are you chasing poor little Jerry mouse? You should be nice to him, Tom, you, you should be friends.”

And then of course, on the other shoulder, a little devil would appear, pitchfork and all. “Ah, don’t listen to that goody two-shoes,” the devil would snarl. “Here, hit the mouse with this frying pan.” And back and forth the argument would go, poor Tom the cat caught in the middle, not knowing which way to turn or what to believe.

And it was always kind of funny, watching a cartoon cat being torn in two directions. Amusing, to see Tom struggle to choose and, struggle to decide. Not so amusing however, when it happens to us. Not so much fun, when we are torn in two directions, not knowing how to choose or what to believe. High school seniors—how long did it take to decide what you want to do next fall? *Have* you decided yet, and are you sure about it? It’s not that one choice is heaven sent and the other is diabolical, it’s not that obvious, all of your options may be good. But which one is best? How do you know and, how do you choose?

Jobs and careers—should I take that position there, or should I hold on to this position here?

Should I move, should I stay, bird in the hand two in the bush? Marriage—is this person, the one for me? For life? How do I know? And if I'm in a marriage, and things are not so good right now, what do I do next? What choice should I make, which way should I go, who can tell me what to do next. Hospitals, and medical care, and the choices to be made there, particularly toward the end of life. How long do I fight this thing, whatever it is, and when do I accept the inevitability of my own death. And so forth. It's not always fun to have to make a choice, even when your options are mostly pretty good, it's not easy knowing which way to go. I don't laugh at Tom cat as much anymore.

And just as an aside, back at my congregation in Indiana. There was a couple, Rex and Diane, who came to church pretty faithfully with the kids; till after a while they stopped. So I went to see them, what's up? Turns out they'd had a friend several years earlier who had died too young from a cancer. And Rex and Diane had gone on after that, trying to decide—Trust God. Give up on the whole thing. God is good and loves us dearly. God doesn't exist, or else He doesn't care very much. After a few years of going back and forth—they'd chosen to give up, on God, and on faith.

Well. The Gospel lesson today, briefly. It's Easter Sunday afternoon, and two disciples were walking from Jerusalem, to their home in Emmaus. And they were trying to decide; as they talked to this *stranger* who joined them along the way you can hear these two disciples going back and forth with this whole, Jesus thing. We thought He was the one sent by God! *Then we saw Him die on a cross.* We had hoped He was the one to redeem Israel! *Yeah, sure, but He's been dead three days now.* But some women said His tomb was empty! The women even said that angels had appeared, saying He was risen! *Yeah, but when the men went to the tomb they didn't have any vision like that. It was just these crazy women!* And back and forth they went, torn between doubt and faith. Unable to choose between hope and despair. A not very much fun place to be—faith doubt hope despair—as I think we know.

Well, this stranger stayed with them, and helped them understand the Bible and God's plan of salvation a little bit better. He talked about how Jesus HAD to die to forgive us, then rise again to

save us. And then of course when they got home and this stranger broke bread with them—well, He was a stranger no more. He was in fact Jesus, risen from the dead! No more fear no more doubt no more despair—hope wins! God wins! It's now clear! And they believed.

And that would be nice, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it be great if Jesus appeared to us too and, clarified all of our choices like that, and made all of our decisions easy? That would be outstanding, to see Jesus and have everything made clear for us. Like it's going to happen, right?

Ah, but yes it will. Yes it will—Jesus will appear, and clarify everything for us. We're just not home yet, that's all. We're not home yet, we here today are still just walking along the way. And we have doubts and worries and we don't always know what to do with them, we have more questions than answers. But we always also have One, who is walking with us, reminding us of the promise. Encouraging us with hope. Filling us with His Spirit, and giving tips along the way. And always walking that way with us, till we are in fact home at last. May that day come quickly, and may the Lord walk with you every step along the way, till it does.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.