

“The Road to Nowhere”

Luke 24:13-35

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Where exactly are you going? It's not very often that any of you leave your house without knowing your destination or the route you must take, especially when needing to avoid all the construction and traffic delays. You have a place to be, a way to get there, and a road to follow that will ultimately end where you intended to go. There's a pretty famous bridge that exists in the San Gabriel Mountains of California known as the “Bridge to Nowhere.” It's a concrete arch bridge, built in 1936, that leads to no roads, due to the abandonment of the project it was meant to serve, and instead it is now a popular hiking destination. A road with no destination is not a place you want to find yourself. You would end up wandering blind in the wilderness, lost and needing rescue.

Is that not a true statement when it comes to the faith? Unbelief is indeed the road to nowhere, and your faith gives you the guidance necessary to avoid the pitfalls of unbelief. But you are not invincible and impervious to the attacks of the world and the doubts and fears that allow disbelief to creep in. That is where the disciples on the road to Emmaus find themselves this morning. They have abandoned all hope in Christ. Just as the Apostles hide in the upper room in disbelief, these men walk in disbelief along the road to nowhere. If this were not true, they would not have said, “But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel.” Their hope is past tense here. They have despaired to the point of even throwing off the faith which they had in Christ just three days earlier.

The believer's sinful nature is a fearsome foe. It overtakes even the strongest of those in the faith, and it seeks exactly what the disciples are experiencing—fear, despair, and unbelief. Because belief in the crucified and risen Savior is its greatest enemy. As one who has been baptized into His death and resurrection, your belief puts it where it belongs, and that is in the dregs of death, where you would otherwise be if not for Jesus' vicarious atonement. Your sinful flesh is constantly trying to pull you down to where it thrives, wishing nothing more for you than to keep you in sin and self-destruction. Your Old Adam needs to be drowned daily, as Peter bids the crowd to drown theirs in the water of Baptism. “Repent every one of you and be baptized,” because that is where relief is found from the scourge of sin that plagues every human being that walks the earth.

Fear and self-loathing are great tools of the evil one that he uses to confuse and weaken the child of God. The disciples walking the road have their eyes darkened, kept

from recognizing their Lord, Jesus Christ, as He walks with them side by side, in order that He might test their faith. And as they walk, they share the story of what Christ allowed to happen to Him for their benefit, not knowing that He was there with them just as He promised He would be. The supposed victory that the devil believed he had won was being bought into by these men. They believed that Christ was dead, his body taken and lost forever. Sin is very good at breaking you down to the worst version of yourself. It makes you believe you are lost and without a destination, wandering on a road to nowhere that ultimately leads to eternal condemnation. How does the believer combat such despair, grief, and shame when their own nature continually fights against them?

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe,” says the Lord. The disciples knew all that had been told them by the words of the prophets, and yet they ignored it—even the words of Jesus Himself as He prophesied about His own death and resurrection. They know that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things. Haven’t they read the scroll of Isaiah? But when unbelief captures the soul, there is no amount of reasoning one can do in order to get themselves out of it. They are kept in the dark as they try to find their own way out and sink deeper and deeper into the depths of their own making. The Word Himself stood with them speaking the words of Holy Scripture to them, and still they did not see that it was Him, truly there among them as He promised to be.

In similar ways, your sinful flesh convinces you that there’s no possible way that Jesus could be present among you. He definitively died upon the cross, breathed His last, and was buried in the tomb. People just don’t come back from the dead, right? You can see how the disciples would be in disbelief. Their sinful natures, just like yours, cannot comprehend the fulfillment of all that Jesus has done. Without the revelation of the Lord Himself, given through the Word, you would be lost in a fog of your Old Adam’s own making. As Luther says in the Small Catechism on the Third Article of the Creed, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.” The Word of the Lord is the means of His divine revelation to His people, and without it being received by faith, you cannot get to the end understanding of what it is that He has truly done. You cannot get yourself off of the road to nowhere. It requires the work of the Holy Spirit. It requires faith worked in your heart by His divine gift to get you off of that road, and onto the road of salvation.

The road of salvation is Jesus. It’s not rocket science. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jn. 14:6).” It is through Christ that the gift of eternal life is attained, no matter who you are or how much good you think you have done in your life. No amount of work will get

you onto that road. Christ alone is the source of your salvation, and He alone is the means of your salvation. More specifically, by His blood—by His death and resurrection—you are made to be righteous in the sight of your Heavenly Father. His righteousness is imputed to you because of what He has done, not because you deserve it. He has gone to the cross to suffer death and shame on your behalf, a death and shame that should be upon your head instead of His. You have the promise of the destination of salvation because of His work at Calvary.

And that is the whole point. He has redeemed you a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. Not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death (Small Catechism, Second Article of the Creed). Faith's end is eternal life, and it is yours because of his blood shed for you, as you will hear in a few moments when you come to His table. That is where His salvation is revealed to you as you partake of His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. In that communion with the whole host of saints, your eyes are opened as you share in the table fellowship of Jesus, just as the disciples recognized Him in the breaking of the bread in our text.

In the preaching of His Holy Word, and in the visible Word of the Sacraments, His grace and mercy is made known to all. By faith, it is appropriated to you as you receive the forgiveness of your sins in His means of grace. In His blood, you are washed clean of the filth of your original sin and that alone is what makes you worthy to receive His gifts. On your own you are not worthy and cannot make yourself worthy of His gifts. Despite your unworthiness, He gives you that which you do not deserve, and He does so because of His divine love for you. Because of His truth that is revealed in the words of Holy Scripture, your hearts burn within you as He speaks to you, and you can declare with your brothers that “the Lord has risen indeed!”

Try as you might, there is no work for you to do on the road to salvation. Focusing on your works as the means of your salvation is nothing more than a road to nowhere. It is one that leads to trust in the self and not in Christ, who has done all the work necessary to redeem the children of God and bring them into His eternal presence. You have received the benefit of His work by the blessing of your baptism, and through that promise of salvation through water and the Word, you are marked as His forever. You once were far off, but now the Lord has called you to Himself. He has placed you on the road to salvation, one which you walk by faith in Him alone. The revelation of His Holy Word has shown this to you, and you have seen the truth of it in the presence of your crucified and risen Savior among you. Hope is yours, just as the hope of the disciples was restored in the revelation of Christ along the road.

You have been born again of imperishable seed through the living and abiding Word of God. The brotherly love of Christ is yours and you perpetuate His love for you in your love for your brothers among you. The meal which you share here today is the foretaste of the Lamb's High Feast, and one that points you to the truth of the fulfillment of that meal in the heavenly dwelling of your Father's house. There, in His holy presence, you will partake of your Lord Jesus in a way that you can't possibly understand. And in the light of His glory, you will dwell in peace and joy, never again despairing as the road to nowhere is wiped away, and joy and eternal bliss will be yours forevermore. Amen.