

LUKE 24:13–35. (EHV)

Now, on that same day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about all of these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing this, Jesus himself approached and began to walk along with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. He said to them, **“What are you talking about as you walk along?”** Saddened, they stopped. One of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” **“What things?”** he asked them. They replied, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be condemned to death. And they crucified him. But we were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel. Not only that, but besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Also some women of our group amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning. When they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb. They found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” He said to them, **“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter his glory?”** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village where they were going, he acted as if he were going to travel farther. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, since it is almost evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he reclined at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and began giving it to them. Suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Then he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, **“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us along the road and while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?”** They got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and those who were with them assembled together. They were saying, **“The Lord really has been raised! He has appeared to Simon.”** They themselves described what had happened along the road, and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus was just over seven miles. If you walked that distance from Trinity toward Colome along Highway 18, you would be well past the Vavra Buttes on the left side of the road. If you walked that distance from Trinity along the county road that heads due south out of town, you would be well past the Sabols’ residence and would in fact have made it to the top of the hill. It would take you about two and a half hours—maybe shorter, maybe longer, depending on your pace. Perhaps you would consider walking that distance if it was only a one-way trip, or if someone were picking you up once you hit the seven-mile mark.

But how in the world do you explain that two of Jesus’s disciples on Easter afternoon not only walked the roughly seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but then also, without a second

thought, as the sun was setting, got up and hurried those seven miles back to Jerusalem? Something very powerful must have set them in motion!

Indeed something very powerful did. Jesus had been with them.

But it was not so much Jesus's physical presence with them that made their hearts burn and then caused them to return to Jerusalem. It was the presence of Jesus in his Word—a presence that we can enjoy today just as much as they did on that first Easter. So today their words are also the prayer on our lips: “Stay with us, Lord Jesus.”

1. Stay with Us So That Our Hearts Burn

It was afternoon on the day Jesus rose from the dead. Two disciples had just left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus, just over seven miles away. We only know one of their names, Cleopas. We don't know if this is the same as the Clopas that John mentions. If he was, then his other name was Alphaeus, his son was called James the Less and was one of Jesus's apostles, and his wife was one of the women who had gone to the tomb that morning and had seen two angels and had later seen Jesus. But Cleopas and Clopas could also be two different men. As for the man who was walking with Cleopas, he is unnamed, but the fact that Luke knows about Cleopas, was the only one to include this story in his Gospel, and told it very vividly lead some to suppose that the other companion was Luke himself.

We don't know exactly why they were going to Emmaus, other than that Emmaus was probably home to one or both of them. The Passover festival was still going in Jerusalem and would last several more days. But the Jews weren't required to hold another sacred assembly until the final day. We do know that these two were surprised and overwhelmed from the events of the last three days, including the rumors and reports of that day. They were probably just mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted and wanted to get away for some rest.

During their two-and-a-half-hour walk, they began conversing and discussing all the things that had happened. While they were conversing, Jesus overtook them. We aren't told how he overtook them or where he came from, just that suddenly he was approaching them and then he caught up to them. We get the impression that Jesus deliberately prevented them from recognizing him.

Jesus asked them about their conversation, which he had overheard. That question stopped them dead in their tracks. Luke paints a poignant scene of three men standing as still as stones on the road—two of them staring gloomily at the ground or off in the distance while the third looks intently and curiously at them, waiting for an answer.

Cleopas was amazed at the ignorance of this stranger and asked him whether he was the only one staying near Jerusalem who didn't know the things that had happened.

“What things?” Jesus asked. So the two disciples began their conversation anew, telling Jesus about Jesus.

Jesus had been a prophet mighty in deed and word both before God—everything he did was pleasing to God and was in harmony with his will—and before the people—even his enemies had to admit that he was powerful and had to be reckoned with. But then Cleopas and Luke, if it was Luke, had to admit to their shame that their own chief priests and leaders had handed this man over to be sentenced to death and had crucified him. This crushed the hopes of many of his disciples, who had hoped that he was going to deliver Israel.

Now, in addition to all this, they continued, there were strange events on this third day since these things happened. Some of the women from their number had gone to his tomb early in the morning and had not found his body. They claimed they had seen a vision of angels who were saying that Jesus was alive. So then two of the male disciples went to the tomb and found things just as the women had said, except Jesus himself they didn't see.

When they mentioned these rumors of the resurrection, Jesus couldn't take it anymore. "You thought *I* was ignorant? How ignorant *you* are! How slow in heart to believe all that the prophets said! Didn't the Christ *have to* suffer these things and enter his glory?" Then he took them through the entire Old Testament. He took them back to the words of Moses. He took them back to all the Prophets. He showed them Jesus's death and resurrection should have been anything but surprising or saddening.

Later, after Jesus had revealed himself and then vanished, the two would marvel. They would marvel not that they had seen Jesus, even though, in their minds, they were the first to do so. (They had not yet heard that anyone had seen Jesus when they left for Emmaus.) They rather marveled about what happened before they knew it was Jesus, marveled at what it was like to have the Scriptures opened to them like that.

I don't have time today to do what Jesus did, and even if I did, I wouldn't be able to. Jesus knew the Old Testament much better than I. But let's at least consider a few of the Old Testament prophecies.

Let's consider Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible. Moses detailed the entire sacrificial system. He taught us about the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the temple. In the Most Holy Place stood the Ark of the Covenant, with the Ten Commandments inside. On top of the ark was the atonement cover, and on top of the atonement cover God himself sat enthroned in the pillar of cloud. Once a year the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the blood of a bull and the blood of a goat on the atonement cover seven times, to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people. And God would look down at the Ten Commandments, which represented how the people had badly bungled their relationship with God by breaking one commandment after another again and again. But his eyes would never get that far, because the first thing he would see was a gold atonement cover covered in blood, not the people's blood, but the blood of a substitute. And he would be appeased.

How can we not see Jesus? How can we not see what he accomplished for our salvation on Good Friday, when the shedding of his blood and his death prevented ours?

Moses also told us how any meat given for a fellowship offering would not be accepted if it were left over until the third day.

How can we not see Jesus? How can we not see that he had to rise from the dead on the third day in order for his sacrifice to be accepted?

Or take the very first gospel promise—how the Messiah would have his heel struck, but he would strike and crush Satan's head. What does that mean? That, even if the Messiah died, he would have to rise again.

Or consider the Scriptures of the Prophets, especially the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah. They spoke in considerable detail about how the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced, how his garments would be taken and divided, how he would be betrayed by his close friend, how by

his suffering he would declare the world innocent of sin, and how after his suffering he would see the light of life and be satisfied and would see offspring, people who would put their trust in his work.

Is there anything in all the world like the Scriptures about Jesus, about our salvation? Could God have made his interest in you, his love for you, any clearer?

Stay with us, Lord Jesus. Stay with us that our hearts may also burn with the warming fire of the truth.

2. Stay with Us So That Our Lips Speak

After marveling at how their hearts had burned, what did the two Emmaus disciples do? “They got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem.” They made quick work of their dinner and table cleanup and hurried the seven miles back to Jerusalem to let the other disciples know. “They found the Eleven and those who were with them assembled together. They were saying, ‘The Lord really has been raised! He has appeared to Simon.’ They themselves described what had happened along the road, and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.”

When the hearts of the Emmaus disciples were filled with God’s word, they couldn’t wait to share it until the next day. They had to share it that same evening.

If you’re the kind of person who needs more courage, boldness, and eagerness in sharing God’s word, then the Emmaus disciples’ words a good prayer for you too: “Stay with us, Lord Jesus. Stay with us that our lips may also speak, as theirs did.”

3. Stay with Us So That We Can Endure the Darkness

But even though we’ve been praying the Emmaus disciples’ prayer, we still haven’t actually studied their original prayer. Actually, they didn’t even say it as a prayer, because they didn’t know yet that the man with them was their Lord. After Jesus had opened the Scriptures to them, they approached the village of Emmaus, and the as-yet-unrecognized travel companion acted as if he were going to travel farther. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, since it is almost evening, and the day is almost over.”

They wanted this man versed in the Scriptures to stay with them because darkness was setting in, and good company is the best light in the darkness. And this man versed in the Scriptures was good company. With the advent of electricity, we are surrounded with light even after sunset. Overhead lights and lamps flood our rooms with light. Our television screens emit bright light. Light illumines our streets even after dark. The night isn’t as scary as it has been for most of human history. But there’s still less light at night, and there still comes a time when we turn all our lights off, except perhaps a nightlight or two, leaving us in darkness. And the fact remains that Satan and his demons still do much of their “best” work at night. The apostle Paul simply calls sins the “deeds of darkness” (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11). Peter and Jude describe hell as a place of “blackest darkness” (2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 6, 13). Old evening hymns oftentimes catalogued various threats to life that lurked in the night and asked God to afford protection from them.

The Emmaus disciples were essentially saying, “Darkness is setting in, but if you who have shared God’s word with us stay with us, it cannot harm us and we will be safe. Though the darkness sets in around us, the word of God you have shared and will no doubt continue to share will fill our hearts with light.”

“Stay with us, Jesus.” We have reason to say the same as our prayer, don’t we? Not just between 6 and 9 p.m. as darkness sets in, but as we notice darkness setting in in other ways. The hymnwriter wrote: “Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide, for round us falls the eventide. Nor let your Word, that heavenly light, for us be ever veiled in night. O God, how sin’s dread works abound! Throughout the earth no rest is found, and falsehood’s spirit wide has spread, and error boldly rears its head.”

The Lutheran composer Johann Sebastian Bach included these words in his cantata that is based on this account from Luke. A bass sings: “Darkness has gained the upper hand in many places. And why has this happened? Simply because small and great alike have not walked in righteousness before you, O God, and have gone against their Christian duty.”

And especially at the end of our lives, as our health declines and death draws near, every day can begin to feel like an evening. The well-known evening hymn, “Abide with Me,” doesn’t just talk about the physical evening we experience at the end of every day. It is talking about the evening of the world, as we draw closer and closer to the end of its history and to Jesus’s return to judge the living and the dead. And by the end of the hymn, it is clear that it is especially talking about the evening of our lives: “Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if thou abide with me. Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes; shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee; in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!”

So we pray: Stay with us, Lord Jesus. Stay with us in Word and sacrament. Stay with us, because your Word correctly explained makes our hearts burn with cheer and joy in the midst of sadness, disappointment, and pain. Stay with us so that our lips speak your word with both our fellow believers and with others who do not know it. Stay with us because of the darkness setting in around us and the darkness that lurks within us. With you we are safe. Drive away Satan and his demons and dispel the darkness in our hearts and lives with the light of your promises and forgiving grace and peace and hope and victory. Assure us, because you rose from the dead as promised, that all of us who believe in you and your salvation from sin, death, and the devil will also rise from the dead to spend eternity with you.

“Stay with us, Lord Jesus,” we pray. And we know he will hear us, because he is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.