

The Third Sunday of Easter • May 8, 2011

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Luke 24:13-35

“Hidden”

There's a lot of hiding that goes on in our world, isn't there? The big news of the past week came last Sunday evening, when the public learned that Osama bin Laden was killed in a raid of the compound in Pakistan where he had been in hiding for some time. Some people have asked how we as Christians should react to this news that comes after almost ten years have passed since the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001. As people who have ourselves heard of and believe in God's mercy and love in His Son, Jesus, we know that we are rescued from eternal death. So when someone – anyone – dies apparently outside of faith in Jesus as Savior, without knowing forgiveness and being called to repentance and new life, it's a sad thing. On the other hand, the government has executed its proper authority in delivering judgment against someone responsible for the deaths of thousands. Justice being done in the battle against those who do evil is a good thing. This is one of those “both/and” situations: we can find some measure of solace in what's happened, but we remember the value of every human life in our Creator's eyes, good and wicked alike. It's safe to say that bin Laden valued his own life, which is why he'd been hiding out all these years. Hidden away from the world, he could continue to live; however, if he was ever discovered... well, the world has heard how that turned out. Someone can stay hidden for only so long.

You and I know something about hiding, too. Our lives began hidden away in our mothers' wombs, unseen by the world around us. Once we're born and out in the great wide open, we return back to our moms or dads for protection, clinging to their leg or ducking behind them, trying to hide away when we're scared. But other times we run away and hide from our parents: what happens when the little child goes reaching for the forbidden before-dinner snack from the cookie jar, only to have it come crashing down off the counter onto the kitchen floor? If you hide, you might be able to escape punishment. It's not like Mom or Dad would know what happened, right? Sure... the family pet must have gotten loose and knocked the jar off the counter... or not. Even grown up, you probably still feel the impulse to go and hide when you're in danger of being caught. But no matter how far you run, no matter where you might go, you can't hide from God. All of us have fallen short in life, done things that we *should not* have done and *not* done things that we *should* have done. We Christians believe that Jesus paid the price for our falling short, our sins, on the cross; in this Easter season, we celebrate that we don't have to hide anymore because of our Creator's love for us through Jesus. So why is it that we often try to keep Jesus hidden in our lives?

Do people know that you're a Christian? Now, I'm not asking if you walk up to everyone that you see and say, “Hey, I'm a Christian! How are you today?” Rather, what do your words and your actions tell the people around you about your faith – about Him to whom you belong? We might have tried to keep Jesus on the down-low, unobtrusive, hidden in our lives because we're concerned about what would happen if people found out. Or, we might have tried to keep Jesus hidden because we think that he only wants to come out on the weekends when we're in worship. We might have even tried to keep Jesus hidden in our lives because we don't really know him all that well and are a little bit afraid of the change that would come if we spent more time with him. Try as we might, though, Jesus doesn't come into our lives to stay hidden.

Jesus came to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a village about two hours' walk from Jerusalem. You heard what happened, how their eyes were kept from recognizing him. They carried with them the weight of the events of the past week leading up to Jesus' death on the cross. And now, on Sunday afternoon, they're walking along and talking with each other, sharing their grief and disappointment, both failing to see how any of what had happened made any sense at all.

But along comes Jesus and he – while seeming to them a stranger – takes them through God’s whole story of salvation. Walking with them, he walks them through who the Messiah had to be and the role that he had to play in the rescue of all people. And all this time, Jesus remains hidden; they can’t see him for who he is. These two disciples then prevail upon Jesus to come and stay with them. Once they sit down for their meal, Jesus breaks bread and gives it to them. It is then that their eyes are fully opened and they can finally see just who it is that has been with them this whole time – but Jesus vanishes, disappearing from their sight entirely. So what do they do? They get up and head right back to Jerusalem that very Sunday evening to tell the other believers what they’d seen and heard, to share all that their living Lord just explained.

Jesus might come to us hidden, but he’s not meant to stay that way. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to us in the Word, the Scriptures. We can’t see him on our own; we can’t see him and what he has done for us. But God gives faith which opens our eyes like the eyes of the Emmaus disciples, so that we can recognize our Savior as he comes to us. They sat down to break bread with Jesus, and we get to do the same in the Lord’s Supper. Jesus comes to us hidden – in, with, and under the bread and the wine that we eat and drink; yet, through faith, we recognize that Jesus is really with us, right there in his body and blood as he gives himself to us. He opens our hearts and minds, and invites us to celebrate his Easter victory in the meal that we share in Holy Communion. The flow of the worship service connects us with the Emmaus disciples: God comes to us through His Word, teaching us and showing us His work in history as we hear the in the Old and New Testaments how our hope is in the Messiah who comes to suffer and die for the people he would save. Then, having pointed us to the Messiah, our Lord comes to share a meal with us in his Supper.

Because our Lord has made Himself known to us through His Word and Sacraments, we don’t need to be in hiding anymore. **God has forgiven you and me and hidden away our sin in Jesus on the cross.** As people who have had our eyes opened by faith, we must not seek to hide Jesus in our lives. Every day, God sets events and opportunities before us. He puts us on the road – figuratively and literally – besides people who don’t understand who Jesus is and what his life, death, and resurrection mean for them. Like the Emmaus disciples as they headed back to Jerusalem on that Easter evening, we need to go and tell what has happened to us on the road and in the breaking of the bread with the Lord; we have great news to share! That news of God’s mercy and grace is meant for the world: for our family, for our friends and acquaintances, and even for those enemies who wish to do us harm. Sometimes it might feel like you’re banging your head against the wall, or you can’t figure out why someone doesn’t get it, like their eyes are being kept from seeing who Jesus is and how he is calling them to know God’s love. We can’t open anyone’s eyes on our own; however, the Holy Spirit is at work – in His time – through us for the people around us. Through the Spirit, we can have the strength, courage, and persistence to keep walking with those in need, showing God’s love in the risen and living Jesus through both our words and our living.

Wherever your journeys in life may take you, you don’t walk alone on the road. Jesus is there, walking with you. He abides, even as evening falls. By faith, he has opened your eyes to show you your Creator’s love for you. He hasn’t come to be hidden in your life; indeed, the truth burns to get out if confined and hidden away. You and I are called to run and tell that truth, living it out in every corner of our lives.

We have a living Lord in Jesus the Messiah, and that can stay hidden for only so long!
Amen.