

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^l from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." ²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

HELP OF THE HELPLESS, OH, ABIDE WITH ME!

Henry Francis Lyte was an Anglican priest. His most famous work is the writing of the hymn we sing next, "Abide with Me." The legend of Lyte and his hymn, "Abide with Me," is Lyte wrote "Abide with me" on the same day he preached his last sermon. Henry Francis Lyte lived with poor health most of his life. Lyte's health had declined to the point where he was no longer able to carry out his pastoral duties. Nevertheless, the story is told, against the urgings of his family, Lyte preached his last sermon on September 4, 1847, and later that afternoon Lyte returned to his study and made the words of the Emmaus disciples his own, writing,

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!

Helpless is a hopeless feeling. It kind of feels like being at the old ball game when it's the 8th inning at your team is down by 10 runs. The other fans are headed to the exit, and you feel like maybe you leave before the 9th inning starts too. The game feels hopeless. Or it's like being at an expensive restaurant when the appetizer and the main course were lousy and the table service was even worse. Do you want to see the dessert menu or would you rather pick up a pint of ice cream from Culver's on the way home. The restaurant feels hopeless.

As shocking as it might sound to our ears, that first Easter Sunday, felt kind of hopeless. It had been a long three days and that third day was a doozy. The tomb was empty. The women had seen angels. The angels had said Jesus was alive, but now it was the afternoon and there was no Jesus. Choices needed to be made. Soon the apostles would make the choice to lock the doors for fear of the Jewish leaders, but Cleopas and another disciple had already made the choice to get out of Jerusalem.

The Emmaus disciples were feeling hopeless. We know the Emmaus disciples were feeling hopeless because the Emmaus disciples tell us. They started by talking to Jesus about Jesus in the past tense, saying "he was a prophet." Then these disciples blamed other people for all the horrible things that happened to Jesus, people like the chief priests and their rulers who handed Jesus to be sentenced to death and crucified. Finally, the disciples talked about themselves. They talked about how they had hoped that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel, but now that hope was gone. It felt like the 8th inning, down by 10 runs. It felt like blowing away good money at a bad restaurant.

The Emmaus disciples needed encouragement. Maybe you need encouragement too. In the Greek language “encouragement” is a compound word. Two words smashed together with no space like “backyard” or “outside” or “bookmark”. The Greek compound word for encouragement is “para+kaleo”. Para means “along side of” and “kaleo” means “talk”. You can even hear the word “call” in “kaleo”. And that’s encouragement, to walk alongside someone and talk to them. Parakaleo is similar to “Paraclete” or comforter. The Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete or Comforter. And so, imagine Jesus walking along side of you and talking with you. Imagine Jesus offering you encouragement and comfort when Jesus says to you and I quote, *“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all the prophets have spoken!”*

Would those words be encouraging for you? Would those words be comforting for you? Easter Sunday in the Festival service we read from Matthew 28:1 which says, *“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.”* Last Sunday, Doubting Thomas Sunday we heard, *“Thomas (also known as Didymus).”* Thomas or Didymus means twin, but we didn’t talk about this twin last Sunday and we didn’t talk about the other Mary on Easter Sunday either. But on Easter Sunday Jesus takes a long walk with a disciple named Cleopas. We don’t know anything about Cleopas and the other disciple is even named. But Jesus takes time for them. Jesus listens to them. And Jesus talks to them in the same way he talked to Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Mary”? Didn’t Jesus mean, at least partly, “Mary, how foolish you are and how slow you are to believe all the prophets have spoken?” And what did Jesus mean when he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here... your hand here?” Did Jesus mean, “Thomas, how foolish you are and how slow you are to believe all the prophets have spoken”?

Yes, we are all helpless. The Mary Magdalenes and Thomases, but also the other Mary and the Twin too. And Jesus is risen to abide with all of us. Jesus is risen to abide with you too. Today, Jesus is here and not only is Jesus here. Other people are here too. Some of these people you know. Some of these people you don’t know. Some people you know by name. Other people you don’t. The same is true about you. Not everybody knows you.

But Jesus knows. Jesus knows you by name. Jesus knows everything there is to know about you. Jesus knows where you are and Jesus knows what you are going through and how foolish you are and how slow you are to believe if you think that he doesn’t. And he who opened the Scriptures so the that hearts of the Emmaus disciples would once again burn with faith concerning the resurrection of Jesus and the regeneration of their hearts knows what you need to hear from Scripture too. And today that word is Jesus abides with me. That word is Jesus is the help of the helpless.

Do you feel his presence? Whether you feel it or not, Jesus is with you. Do you see his presence? Whether you see it or not, Jesus is with you. The Emmaus’ disciples saw Jesus and you will see Jesus too. Not a single one of us except maybe an itty-bitty baby is more than 100 years away from seeing Jesus with their own eyes. Henry Franis Lyte saw his help of the helpless on November 20, 1847, at the age of 54. The great hymn “Abide with Me” wasn’t even three months old when Henry Francis Lyte saw his Savior with his own eyes.

What’s important is we see Jesus too. What’s important is we see Jesus in his Word and sacraments. When you pray as many of us do, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest,” do you see Jesus at your table? And when you come to the Lord’s Supper as many of you will, do you believe Jesus is risen and really present in, with and under the bread and the cup as Jesus says he is?

The Emmaus disciples, Cleopas and what’s his name, saw Jesus and they had their ministry legs again. They had walked away from all the trouble and drama that was in Jerusalem, but now their ministry legs were running toward all the trouble and all the drama. Cleopas and what’s his name, saw Jesus and they found their gospel voice. These little-known two found the more popular eleven and told them what had happened on the way. Not long ago, they were all helpless, but now that help of the helpless had abided with them, they were busying themselves with the gospel ministry that helped each other.

The gospel ministry is for all people and today is no different, but today the gospel emphasis in on the disciples who are walking away or less active because they struggle to see hope. I pray gospel of the help of the helpless helped you today and will give you the ministry legs and the gospel voice to be an active partner in the ministry of the gospel. Amen.