

Luke 24:13-35

I don't title my sermons really, but if I were to title this one it would be: "The best sermon ever told." As you may or may not know I have been a pastor for nearly 8 years. And while some of that seminary education and those languages has faded a bit, it has been replaced with years of practical experience and continued education. And even with all this experience I'm still pretty young right? So I supposedly have all the energy and motivation in the world still. And it is for these reasons I can boldly say to you, if you come across a Pastor who actually thinks he has spoken the best sermon ever told, you need to find another pastor.

I have no illusions that I am the most experienced, or the smartest pastor and by all means I would never say I am the best preacher. So, I would never say I have written the best sermon ever told. Which is why the title for today's sermon would have some parenthesis next to it, so it would read: The Best Sermon Ever Told (Not this this one). This sermon you hear on April 26th at Hope Lutheran is probably not going to be the best sermon you ever hear, and that's ok. So why the title? Because in our sermon today we will be talking about possibly the best sermon ever told.

In our readings we actually hear about two great sermons. On Pentecost Peter speaks to the crowds in Jerusalem and teaches them about repentance and baptism and the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness he gives them. And three thousand people are converted. My goodness what a sermon that must have been! Praise God we get to hear some snippets of it. I would have loved to hear it all.

But the one that really makes me green with envy is the sermon told by Jesus, the champion of our faith, the Risen One himself, told to the two disciples, not two of The Twelve, but other followers who get this great honor to have the Risen Lord come to them. He tells it as they traveled down the road to the town of Emmaus. This was a good sermon.

A good sermon connects with the hearers. It has something to do with their lives, otherwise, who cares? And as Jesus walked down the road his sermon had everything to do with his hearers. He saw they were sad, he heard what they were discussing and so he connects with them. “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” They were talking about their dashed hopes. Look at what they say: “Jesus of Nazareth, a man who *was* a prophet.” As in, “not anymore.” He’s dead and gone, they lost the hope of their prophet, the One who speaks for God. Then they said, “we *had hoped* that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Had hoped. As in, “we don’t hope it anymore.” He’s dead and gone, they lost the hope of being redeemed, being saved. And so Jesus, in this great talk, in this great sermon, connects to the people. He touches on their hopes and dreams and struggles.

Do you have any of those? What had you hoped for and has been dashed? A good doctor’s report? Some financial relief? A little less struggle with that particular temptation? Had you hoped for a friend or a family? Had you hoped to reconcile with that person? Maybe you have stopped hoping at all. We are, quite often, just like the two men on the road to Emmaus, we are sad. A good sermon, one like Jesus told, touches on that, admits it.

A good sermon connects with the hearer. It also preaches truth to the hearer, it preaches the Law. And that is not always fun, it often convicts us of our sin and all the ways we fall short. Jesus tells the two men, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” That’s law, that’s some conviction. Not all good sermons are all good news. Because if we don’t think we need any good news, the good news isn’t so good. You don’t think you need a doctor if you don’t think you are sick. So a good sermon reminds us of our sin, so we can look to the Savior. So how have we been slow of heart to believe the promises of God that have been spoken to us? What doubts and fears do we have? What sins are you still fighting, or, even worse, giving up fighting against? Do we take time to hear the promises of God now that we are far from each other? A good sermon causes us to reflect on such things, Jesus’ sermon certainly did.

But a good sermon, while not all good news, *does have good news – it has abundant Gospel.* And the first way to bring the Gospel is to remind the hearer of the plan of God. To broaden their perspective to see past the distractions and rumors to the truth of God and His Work. So look what Jesus does: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” To hear that sermon! Ah! I don’t care what seminary you went to, I don’t care how many years of experience you have, I don’t care how much energy you have, that is the sermon you want to hear. And here is where the connection with the hearers and their dashed hopes, this is where their sinfulness, is begun to be healed. As the preacher, Jesus, teaches and comforts them with the work of God to bring forth a Messiah, a Savior. “You think Jesus died and it’s all over? You think he’s dead and gone and you have no hope?” Ah, if only they knew who they were speaking with! Then they would know and see, just

what Jesus explains in His sermon: that he was supposed to die, to take our sins; that the whole Old Testament is about Him –the coming Messiah; that He is the One come to undo the brokenness of this world, the brokenness of our sin, and to be open up eternal life and victory over death. Which is why he was supposed to rise just like they had heard in the rumors from the women. What a sermon that must have been! They even say, their hearts were burning within them as he spoke. Is that what hope being awakened feels like? A good sermon awakens hope by pointing to the promises, plan, and work of God in Jesus.

And that reminds me of the next thing you will find in a great sermon. The most important thing about a sermon. The most important thing about any sermon. If you hear a sermon and it doesn't have this in it, you didn't hear a sermon at all; some guy just soapboxed to you. The most important thing about a sermon is that it shows you Jesus. It shows you the true Jesus, the crucified-and-risen-again-for-you Jesus. If I preach a sermon and don't talk about Jesus, please, any of you, tell me. So I can repent. They may be entertaining, they may be emotional, they may be said with great passion, but if there is no Jesus, it is not the best sermon ever told, it isn't a sermon at all.

Jesus himself walked down the road with the Emmaus disciples and told them such amazing things, I wish I was there. But then he did the greatest thing, he showed them Jesus in the greatest way. He revealed that He, the guy trudging all those miles, kicking rocks down the path, recalling Old Testament verses, that same guy, was Jesus risen from the dead. He showed them Jesus, he showed them himself, the risen one, victorious over death, and in doing so their sadness was gone completely, it was turned to joy.

And that same Jesus has come to you. His name is upon you in baptism, his body and blood given in communion. And he has promised where two or more are gathered in my name I am with You. And if you are watching this alone, take heart, His Spirit comes in the Word, to strengthen you. Jesus is yours. His cross, his victory, yours, received in faith.

I don't know if this was one of my better sermons or not, but I hope we all appreciate how Jesus connects with the two men, he convicts them of their sin, but then he gives them the healing Gospel, the true teaching, and he shows them who he is – the Risen Savior. I know that that was a good sermon. I would have loved to hear it. Our comfort though, is that what these men did hear, what all that the apostles heard, were written for us in Scripture. So that we might know the truth of what is good and right, which might convict us, but we might also know that there is hope for us, because the plan of heaven was for Jesus do die and rise and to come to us in a very real way, to give us every blessing and a share in his eternal victory. In the name of the best preacher and teacher, true God, and the only Risen Savior: Jesus.

Amen.