

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Easter 3

April 15, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Let's go for a walk

—1 John 1:1-2:2

“Let's go for a walk!” Do you remember when those words meant something special? Back in the good old days, before texting and Instagram and Snapchat a young man might ask the lovely young woman he was courting if she might like to go for a walk. A husband or a wife might say to their spouse, “Let's go for a walk.” And you walk and hold hands and talk and just enjoy each other's company. With the right person at your side, going for a walk can be a special experience.

Back in Jesus' day, long before Toyotas and Teslas, people did a lot more walking. Can you imagine what it would be like to walk along the dusty pathways of Judea and Galilee with Jesus at your side? To be able to talk with him, to ask him questions, to learn from the Master himself about the kingdom of God, to have him open the Scriptures and explain them to you? That would be pretty amazing, wouldn't it? That's what two men walking near Jerusalem got to experience on the evening of Easter Sunday. One of those men we know was named Cleopas, because Luke tells us his name in the Gospel. The other one we don't know his name for sure, but some traditions say it might have been Luke himself—the other man walking with Cleopas on the road to Emmaus. These two guys were walking together and talking together and wondering what in the world all the events of the last 72 hours could possibly mean—the rabbi from Nazareth betrayed and crucified, rumors that he was alive again, their heads were spinning trying to make sense of everything they had experienced.

And then Jesus came, and he walked with them. They didn't recognize him, this stranger who chided them for their foolishness and their slowness to believe, who opened the Scriptures to them and explained that the Christ had to suffer and die and rise from the dead. They didn't realize they were walking with Jesus until the moment when he sat down to break bread with them and opened their eyes. As soon as Jesus made them realize who he was, he disappeared from their sight. You can only imagine how these two men, completely blown away by what they had experienced, had to run back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples.

In spite of everything they had heard, the disciples couldn't believe that Jesus was alive. Their reaction was very reasonable: Dead bodies don't come back to life. The Roman executioners who crucified people were very good at what they did. The body of Jesus of Nazareth that was taken down from the cross on Friday was in no condition to start breathing again on Sunday. The disciples were stunned by the news, and they were trying to make sense of everything—and then Jesus appeared to them all. John tells us that he showed them his hands and his side. Can you picture the disciples crowding around Jesus to touch him, to make sure he was real, feeling the wounds where the nails had held him to the cross and where the soldier's spear had pierced him? Luke tells us in our Gospel today that Jesus even asked them for something to eat, so that they could see firsthand that he wasn't a ghost or a phantom or an apparition. He was the real, resurrected Lord! You know, we give the disciple Thomas—who wasn't there that night—flak because he refused to believe; we call him “doubting Thomas,” and rightly so. But we might go a little easier on Thomas when we understand that he was just asking for the same thing that the other disciples had experienced—to touch, to feel. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side [just like you guys got to do!], I will not believe it” (John 20:25).

So John writes: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.* What you and I have in Scripture is nothing other than eyewitness testimony of what these confused, trembling, doubting disciples really touched and heard and felt and saw. They saw, touched, heard, felt the risen Lord Jesus Christ. They knew Jesus was divine, that he was from out of this world, because he did things that were out of this world—the greatest of which was his own resurrection from the dead, confirming and proving that he is the very Son of God!

So what's it like to go for a walk with Jesus? To trust him, to walk through life with Jesus the risen Christ at your side? Jesus himself tells us, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:13). John tells us the same thing about walking with Jesus in our text today: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from*

all sin. A walk with Jesus is a walk in the light. What's the difference between walking in the darkness and walking in the light? I think we all know. Walking in the darkness is spooking around in the shadows. Trying to hide our sinful behavior from God and from others. Keeping secrets from our parents or our spouses. Pretending to be one thing but living like something else. Living a lie, deception, dishonesty—this is not a walk with Jesus. Jesus said, "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:20). A walk with Jesus is open, honest, transparent. There are no secrets. There is no deception. There are no lies. There's nothing to hide. Jesus said, "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:21).

"Let's go for a walk." There might be a big difference between your sweetheart saying to you, "Let's go for a walk," and the boss saying to you, "Let's go for a walk." Jesus is both our very best Friend, and he's also our Master. Sometimes when we're walking with Jesus he might tell us some things we don't like to hear. Sometimes Jesus might put his arm around us and say, what you did was really hurtful and offensive to me. It calls for an apology. Repent of that sin. He doesn't say that to us because he's intolerant or hateful. He calls us to repent of our sins because he loves us and wants to forgive us and draw us back to himself. Unfortunately, what is so often our reaction when we're confronted with our sin? When we're told we've done something wrong our first reaction is to make an excuse, to justify ourselves, to blame someone else, to make it seem like what we've done is no big deal. Whatever! There is a host of things we can say and do to try to avoid responsibility for what we've done. The problem is: *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.* When we try to justify ourselves we are refusing to let God justify us. When we try to come up with our own solution to our sin, we are running away from God's solution for our sin. The problem is that our solution for our sin doesn't work. It doesn't solve the problem; it just compounds the deception. God's solution is so much better. God wants nothing more than to give us his love and forgiveness: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Let's go for a walk! In this walk with Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins. *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* The one who walks with us is also the one who pleads for us. Whenever we sin, Jesus advocates for us in the presence of his heavenly Father and ours: My blood was spilled for that sin. I died on the cross for the forgiveness of that sin. In the Old Testament, when a sin was atoned for, it was covered over so that it could no longer be seen. It disappeared. When Jesus died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world, his blood covered over all the filth of our sin and washed it away. We are covered over by the perfect innocence of Jesus, and God doesn't see our sin. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world. That's a really important point, because Satan is always trying to get us to doubt Jesus' forgiveness. Satan is always trying to get us to feel like we cannot be forgiven. The Apostle John reminds us that simply is not true. Every sin has been forgiven and covered over by Jesus' blood.

Let's go for a walk! The Christian life is not a sprint; it's not over in a few seconds. It's also not a marathon; a marathon is over in a few hours. The Christian life is a very long walk in the same direction with Jesus at our side. We can't see him now at our side, we can't put our fingers into the nail marks and our hands into his side, but he himself has told us, "I will be with you always to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And because he has promised it, we know it is true. Peter says to us, "Though you have not seen him you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8,9). Even though we can't see Jesus walking with us at our side through life, there is a place where he does let us see him. I mentioned earlier that God wants nothing more than for us to know he loves us and forgives us, so in Holy Communion he lets us touch and see and taste Jesus. Yes, Jesus is really present in the Sacrament of the Altar. How? Jesus says so. His word makes it so.

Let's go for a walk! Since we walk with Jesus, we want to know what he teaches. That means we want to hear his Word, and we want to learn his truth. But finally, in this walk through life, our relationship is not with a set of teachings or a system of dogma. Our relationship is not first and foremost with a book. Our relationship is not with a concept or an abstraction or even a "religion." Our relationship is with a man, a real man, whom the first Christians touched and felt and saw and listened to. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He is more than a prophet. His title is "Christ," because he is the Chosen One of God. He is risen from the dead, and his resurrection on the third day proves that he is the Son of God, fully divine, with all power in heaven and on earth. He invites you to walk with him in the light, on the path of righteousness, where there is full forgiveness for your sins. Let's go for a walk on this journey through life, with Jesus at our side, on the path where he himself takes us to heaven. Amen.