



good shepherd  
presbyterian church

## **Making the Way for Repentance**

Luke 24:13-47

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So this all [the communion table, set with three fancy place settings] has been sitting here this morning, hopefully piquing your interest. Imagine if you came by the Austell's house and we invited you in and you found our dining room table set like this. You asked, "What's this for?" And we responded, "It's set for you, come and have a meal with us!" As I read today's scripture and prepared the sermon, I was struck by just how far ahead and how completely God has gone before us to prepare for us. It can seem like we discover God. A parent takes us to church or we go to a revival meeting or a friend shares with us about Jesus. But then we realize God isn't surprised to see us, but has been expecting us all along, even sometimes calling out to us or pursuing us before we realized it. I'll just let you take in this image and I'll return to it at the end.

Today we are looking at a passage that has always fascinated me. It is the "Road to Emmaus" story where the resurrected Jesus appears to two people leaving Jerusalem after his death. They did not know about the Resurrection, and Jesus reveals himself to them. But he does so by walking them through the scriptures, saying, "all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." That's the ultimate Sunday school class, right? Jesus is teaching all the key parts of the Old Testament that point to him and what he has just done. Wouldn't that be amazing? Now we don't know exactly what parts of the Law, Prophets, and Writings he used, so what I'm going to look at with

you is just one set of possibilities. The point I'd like to emphasize, though, is the extent to which God prepared beforehand for welcoming you to His Table of Grace.

## **The Law**

I can think of a number of passages from the Law that Jesus might have spoken about that day. I think of Moses himself, who led God's people from slavery to freedom in the Exodus, facing the wrath and opposition of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. That same Exodus story contains the first Passover, where God's people were saved from death by the blood of a lamb identifying them as God's people and marking their trust in God's Word and direction.

I think of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. There, in response to questions about being "born again," Jesus compares what will happen to the Son of Man to the Numbers 21 account of Moses making a bronze serpent – a symbol of the people's sin – and putting it up on a pole that all who looked upon it in obedience and faith would be healed. Jesus says later in John 5:46, talking about the ways scripture testifies about him: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Jesus believes God has been preparing the world – setting the table – for generations as seen through the Torah, the core five books of Moses that make up Hebrew scripture and our Old Testament.

## **The Prophets**

In the prophets, the 17 books of preaching that end the Old Testament, I can think of a number of passages from that anticipate Jesus. We've spent some time in Isaiah these past eight weeks or so. Isaiah 53 describes the "suffering servant" that would come: a "man of sorrows acquainted with grief." (v.3) Jesus quoted from that passage more than once, but especially in Luke 22 at the Last Supper and as they prepared to head to the garden where Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Moses: see also Gen 3:15; 12:3; Num 21:9 [John 3:14]; Deut 18:15 [John 1:45]; John 5:46

would be arrested. Isaiah is also in the forefront in many of the details of Jesus' birth as well early in his ministry, like when he reads from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue to declare good news, liberty, freedom, and the Year of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> One of the recurring themes of the prophets is the promise of God's Messiah, or "anointed one." These promises helped prepare the world – setting the table – for the coming of that Messiah, Jesus Christ.

## **The Psalms**

Finally, Jesus explains how the Psalms point to him. Often we will focus on Psalm 118 on Palm Sunday, but Psalm 22 and 69 are well-known in conjunction with Jesus' crucifixion in their description of forsakenness and suffering. Psalm 72 speaks of God's righteousness and judgment, extended through the descendant of David (i.e., the Messiah). That Psalm also concludes with a vision of God's blessing extending through God's people to all nations: "Let all nations call him blessed... may the whole earth be filled with God's glory." (vv. 17, 19). We will see that same theme in play at the end of today's text.<sup>3</sup> The poems and songs found in the Psalms have been telling the story for ages – setting the table – until Christ should come and God's mission be undertaken anew.

## **Good News and God's Mission (v.47)**

In verses 46-47 we read a summary of what Jesus saw in the scriptures. There are two things Jesus says the Old Testament scriptures teach. One is the Easter message, the Good News: "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day." (v.46) The second thing is that "repentance for forgiveness of sins" would be proclaimed to the world. This is the mission: to take the Good News to the world. We just saw that expressed in the Psalms and it is at the core of God's covenant with

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<sup>2</sup> Prophets: see also 2 Sam 7:12-16; Is 7:14 [Matt 1:23]; Is 9:1f [Matt 4:15f]; Is 42:1 [Matt 12:18ff]; Is 53:4 [Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37]; Dan 7:13 [Matt 24:30] Mic 5:2 [Matt 2:6]; Zech 9:9 [Matt 21:5]; Acts 13:27

<sup>3</sup> Psalms: see also Ps 2:7ff [Acts 13:33]; Ps 16:10 [Acts 2:27]; Ps 22:1-18 [Matt 27:34-46]; Ps 69:1-21 [John 19:28ff]; Ps 72; 110:1 [Matt 22:43f]; Ps 118:22f [Matt 21:42]

Abraham back in the Torah. From the beginning God promised to bless Abraham in order to bless the world. The nations are always in view.

Let me remind you what repentance is. Last week we saw that it was re-framed; no longer an impossible task for humans, to turn from sin to righteousness. Now it is the invitation to turn to Jesus, to trust in the one who WAS righteous. That is why we say that it is THROUGH JESUS that we have forgiveness of sins. It is because it is now possible to truly and effectively repent, by turning to Jesus. So that is part of the Good News mission – to carry that news, repentance now truly made effective through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So let me return finally to my illustration to tie this together. Interestingly enough, Jesus literally shared a meal with them as he opened their minds to understand. Repentance and salvation isn't something we do or discover. We don't climb the mountain or pass the tests or scrounge up enough mojo or righteousness or goodwill to create our own seat at the table. Rather, from the foundation of the world God has been preparing a place for you, made possible because Jesus, who has a place, has invited you to join him. And I set a third place to remind you and me that it's not just "me and Jesus"; Jesus always has in view others. We are invited so that we may invite. We are welcomed so that we may welcome.

As I said at the beginning, we may feel like we have stumbled onto or discovered God; or we've been introduced by parents or friends. But when we come to the table we realize that God has been preparing for us all along. That's pretty amazing. And part of that amazing realization is that there is still room at the table for others for whom God has also prepared a place. Let us celebrate the Good News and embrace the mission, for the Table is set and all are invited. Amen.