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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church (Pulpit Exchange)
January 24, 2010
Luke 24:36-48

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

First, I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in Christ at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, and by extension from all the congregations in the Greater Kirkland Ecumenical Parish. We are very thankful to be your partners in GKEP and to work together in Kirkland.

When I was young, my family attended Christ Lutheran Church in Edmonds. That congregation is now Edmonds Lutheran Church, but it's in the same building. When I was in high school, we got a new youth pastor, and we started a youth group. We did some servant projects, like going to Portland for a Habitat for Humanity project, and we went on retreats, and we served the pancake breakfast on Easter Sunday.

But, without a doubt, one of our favorite activities was the lock-in. It's a classic youth group thing, the lock-in: you get to church after dinner, and you stay there all night. Sometimes you go bowling or play broom hockey or something else outside the church, but for the most part, you stay in, and you stay up all night, and you have pancakes in the morning and then you go home and sleep all day.

We liked the lock-ins, but what we loved during the lock-in was playing hide-and-seek in the church at about midnight. We turned all the lights off and gathered in the fellowship hall and picked one person to be 'it,' and then we scattered all over the building to find the best hiding place.

Of all the lock-ins, there's one in particular that I remember. It was during the winter, so it was dark when we got there, and cold. It was raining, and windy. We ran around looking for hiding spots, and I found my particular favorite, which was in one of the old classrooms upstairs, my old Sunday-School room from elementary school.

Mrs. Nutley had been my Sunday School teacher in that room, when I was in first or second grade. She was a very nice lady. She smelled like hairspray and cookies, and we usually did some kind of craft with glitter or construction paper, and we often heard a bible story with the aid of the flannelboard characters.

It was a familiar room, but darkness makes everything look unfamiliar. A dark night, can make even the safest, most comforting place feel as if you had never been there before – you can hear strange noises which never seem to be there during the day, and you imagine weird shadows stalking you around the room.

I hid in this dark place, and waited for someone to find me. I could hear people running around, chasing each other through the building, hiding and seeking and finding and then squealing as they were found. Then it got quiet again. Every once in awhile a set of footsteps would walk past the room. It was very dark, and the building creaked and groaned, and the wind gusted and the rain hit the windowpanes.

And then, unbeknownst to us, our youth pastor turned on the sound system, which was broadcast throughout the building, and he turned on the microphone and put it right up to his mouth, and he did this: (laugh). We were all high schoolers, all smart enough to know that there are no monsters under the bed, all old enough to have outgrown the

boogeyman – but we came tearing out of our hiding places, running through the dark building, half-terrified, and half-laughing, and ran into the fellowship hall, where all the creaking noises and the windy darkness and the imaginary voices disappeared, because even though it was still dark, suddenly we were together, flesh and blood again, real people you could touch and smell and talk to. Nothing makes the darkness disappear as quickly as the voice of a friend.

Today's gospel reading is the end of a much longer story, which begins in the darkness. Two of Jesus' friends are walking down a lonely road, a few days after his crucifixion, and talking with each other about the events of those last days. They probably wept as they remembered, and wondered about the meaning of what they had seen. A man appears among them, and begins walking with him, and at his questioning they tell him why they are sad, why they grieve.

The stranger begins to talk about the scriptures with them, and although we don't know the content of that conversation, you can imagine that this stranger might have reminded them of God's steadfast love, of the stories of their ancestors, all the times of deliverance from slavery, hope in the midst of fear, grace in times of anxiety. They are so taken by this stranger that, even in their darkness, they invite him to a meal. "Stay with us," they say, "for it is evening, and the day is nearly over." So he comes to table with them, and it is there – after he breaks the bread and blesses it and hands it to them – that they realize they have been walking with a friend all along. It is Jesus, and as soon as they know it, he vanishes from their sight.

So they find their friends and tell them what has happened, and in the middle of that conversation, Jesus appears again: this time they know it is him, and yet they are afraid. He shows them the wounds on his hands and feet, but it still does not seem real to them. Then comes one of my own favorite verses in the bible: "while in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, Jesus said to them, 'have you anything here to eat?'" And they give him a piece of fish, and they eat together.

In the darkness of their grief, it was a simple gesture which gave them hope – two meals, one of bread, and one of fish – two ordinary, simple moments in which the dark night, the wind and cold, the frightening voices and the scary shadows disappeared. To comfort them, Jesus did not perform a great miracle or summon the angels from on high; he did not call down the voice of God or do anything extraordinary at all. To assure them of his presence, he shared a meal.

It does not always take an extraordinary act to bring light into the darkness. Sometimes a simple gesture – a meal, a kind word, the presence of another person – is all it takes. Sometimes, it's all we have. We watch the enormous suffering in Haiti, even as we remember other places in the world where people are hungry and afraid and without safe shelter, and we consider the overwhelming size of the problem, and the darkness seems as if nothing can dispel it. All we have are small things: money to give, food to share, prayers to offer. All the relief workers there have is their skill, their time, enough to help perhaps one person, two people. Is it enough? It's all there is.

We watch in our own country as Christians of all kinds disagree with one another, argue about how to understand the bible, argue about how to vote and what is truly faithful, argue about whose worship of God is most true, and we wonder how seven fairly small congregations in Kirkland can make a difference. But we meet each other today, and we work together in our community, and we become real to each other, as Jesus did to his

disciples, and suddenly there is nothing to fear. As long as we keep ourselves distant from each other, keep only to those who look and talk and think like us, it is easy to forget how deeply we are connected to one another.

But it doesn't have to take much to bring light into the darkness. It takes one person talking to another. It takes different congregations helping their community together. It takes generosity of all shapes and sizes, from people of all backgrounds and faiths, sent to a people in desperate need.

It doesn't seem like much, but it's the only way we have to do as Jesus commanded – to go, be witnesses of these things. The promise is that God gives power from on high, so that ordinary people like us can do ordinary things which, somehow, in God's kingdom, become extraordinary. We can share meals with those who are hungry. We can offer support to our brothers and sisters in Haiti. We can share worship and fellowship with our friends in other congregations.

We can touch and see and grasp one another, and each time we do, the light creeps into the darkness just a little more. We become a little more real to each others. We remember how deeply we are all, every person in this world, connected to one another – how, when one suffers, we all suffer; when one rejoices, we can all rejoice.

We are witnesses of these things, in Kirkland and to the ends of the world. May we go out in our joy, even when we are disbelieving and still wondering, to shine light wherever we go. Amen.