

Good Morning, This week as I was thinking back to Easter Sunday and preparing for today's message an interesting question came into my thoughts. Why do most of us eat Ham on Easter Day? When I began to think about an answer, my mind went directly to the dietary laws of Jewish people not being allowed to eat pork. Now, as Christians, wouldn't it make perfect sense for us to traditionally pick a kind of meat for Easter dinner that really symbolizes our separation from the Jewish faith? So how did Christians settle on the idea of eating Ham for Easter Dinner? What if I told you that the Christian tradition of eating ham on Easter had nothing to do with any religious significance? What if I told you that Christians started eating ham at Easter because Ham was simply in season. You see, when there wasn't any refrigeration; ham was cured in the fall and able to be preserved through the winter. Then when spring came the ham was ready to eat and since Easter came in the springtime it just seemed like a good match to serve ham. So now that Easter has come and gone, and the leftovers from our Easter Dinner have twiddled down to next to nothing, we are sort of left with the feeling that Easter is now over! But is Easter really over? Maybe Easter Day is over but the Season of Easter has just started. How many of us know that the Season of Easter is really 50 days long? Now, one could ask, "What are we supposed to do now for 50 days? Didn't we just come through Lent and that was 40 days long?" "When can we just get back to our regular lives?" Well, getting back to our regular lives is really what the Season of Easter is all about. You see the Season of Easter is a time for all of us to celebrate the good news of Jesus' resurrection and what that really means in our lives. What we experience, today, is very much the same as the disciples and the early Christians experienced over 2000 years ago. We can think about the Season of Easter as time for us to absorb, reflect and appreciate the implications of Jesus' resurrection on our lives. And it would be almost impossible for us to arrive at those understandings in just one day. To begin our journey into the Season of Easter I would like to share a story that is very close to my heart and that story is the story of two of Jesus' followers walking on the road to Emmaus. You see as our story begins these two followers have not yet experienced Jesus' resurrection and they still believe that Jesus is dead. There is a favorite painting of mine that hangs in our home and it's this painting that I would like to share with us this morning. Earlier we handed out a smaller picture version of the painting for to you have. What I'd like for us to do at

this time is to take a few moments and silently reflect on the picture. As you reflect, try and imagine yourself as one of the two followers walking down the road not knowing that it is Jesus there with you. Then try and think about what it would be like to be walking down the road knowing that your savior, Jesus, had just been crucified and died. Then I would like for us to reflect on where you feel and sense Jesus, today, in your life, not having seen him, but knowing He is there. Okay, let's begin with our reflection time. Okay times up! So, what was it like to put yourselves in Jesus' follower's footsteps? Can you imagine visiting with a stranger and not knowing it was Jesus? Have you ever wondered if Jesus, Himself, has visited you through an interaction with a stranger? I know that I have thought about angels working through people we meet. Well, my goal of our picture reflection was to put our minds and thinking back to the time when all of Jesus followers thought he was dead. Then from that thinking we may understand and appreciate the wonderful news of Easter Morning when Jesus rose from the dead. You know, I can still remember the very first time that I really had a good look at this painting. I was just completing my seminary internship and getting ready to follow where God's call would lead me when I came across the painting. As I looked upon the painting, the first and most overwhelming feeling for me was a sense of not being alone and I knew it was Jesus that was with me, even though I couldn't see Him. And with this realization I was no longer concerned about being alone in my new journey as a pastor. My next feeling was that I would always be able to call upon Jesus for strength and guidance, no matter how difficult the challenge was before me. This painting now hangs in our hallway and I find that every time I look at it I get the same feeling as I did the very first time. Ok, let's move on and begin to understand the story that inspired the artist to paint this picture. To begin with, we need to set the time frame as to when Jesus and these men were walking down the road to Emmaus. Amazingly enough, this painting takes place on the very same day that the empty tomb of Jesus was discovered following His death on the cross. Remember when the women went to the tomb and did not find Jesus' body and they were puzzled when two men in bright dazzling robes met them. The men said to them "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is living?" Let's remember this question, as we will come back to it later in our message. Well, next the women returned to the disciples and told them what had happened but the

disciples thought their story was nonsense and did not believe it. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb where he did not find Jesus' body either and he too wondered what had happened. So now we have set the stage for what we see in the painting. The painting is depicting a time later in the day when two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, which was about 7 miles away. About the same distance from Weaver to Kellogg. As the two walked along the road they were talking about what had just happened earlier that morning and then Jesus came upon them, as a stranger, but they didn't know it was Jesus. Then Jesus asked them "What are you discussing so intently"? They replied, "Where have you been for the last few days that you didn't know about all the things that have happened? Jesus asked, "What things?" The men went on to explain all that had happened over the past three days and that they were sad and disappointed because they thought that Jesus had died and they had lost their Messiah. Then Jesus said, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe what the prophets wrote in the Scriptures"! The prophets clearly said that the Messiah would have to endure all these things before entering His glory. They walked on and as they were getting close to Emmaus, Jesus acted as if he was going on. The men asked him to stay the night. So he went with them and at supper, Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus! So today, what are we to learn from this story and this painting? Well for myself, I've learned, just how human I am, and that I too have experienced the same feelings about Jesus that his followers did on that road to Emmaus. You see for me it speaks to that one simple question, "Where is Jesus?" Well, let's go back to that earlier question that was asked of the women at the tomb when two men in dazzling robes confronted them. Remember the two men asked the women "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is living". You know, I didn't realize until I first understood this verse that at times I have been doing this very same thing in my search to find Jesus in my life. You see at times, my mind, wants to debate if Jesus is really here with me or as the men at the tomb stated "among the dead" and not in my life. Have you ever been asked by a young child, "Where is Jesus?" or "How come I can't see Jesus?" You know adults also ask these same questions too. So how do we answer these questions when asked? Well to begin with there is no better place to start by telling the Easter Story. You see when we tell the Easter Story we are letting

our children and others know that Jesus is alive; that Jesus helped people; that Jesus died for our sins; that Jesus rose from the dead; that Jesus is now in Heaven; and that Jesus continues to watch over us, guide us and speak to us through His Holy Spirit. And it's in Jesus' Holy Spirit where we can find Him today, in this world, in our hearts and in our prayers. So back to the question, "Where is Jesus?" We can answer, by telling them that Jesus is with the Holy Spirit. So back to the question, "How come I can't see Jesus?" We can answer that, "The Holy Spirit is like the wind, we can't see it but we can feel it". So just because we can't see Jesus we can know He is here because we can feel him in our hearts and minds. And as I gaze upon the "Road to Emmaus" painting I can still imagine myself as one of Jesus' followers, not being able to see Him, but knowing He is with me. And just like with Jesus' followers He will find the right time and the right place for us to come and recognize His presence in our hearts and in our lives. So, as we journey with Jesus here on this earth, there will be many times that we will sense His presence, that we will sense His comfort and that we will sense His love for us. You see we don't need to have Jesus physically standing in front of us to feel his presence, all we have to do is to be still and quiet and allow Jesus' Holy Spirit to flow into our hearts as a wind that we cannot see but a wind that we can feel. I'd like to close our message with a verse from the 3RD Chapter of John, ***"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*** Amen

Readings for Sunday, April 10, 2015

Luke 24: 28-34 By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the

night with us, since it is getting late.” So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.

***Please stand and join together as we sing
“Glory be to the Father” Hymn #70***

Ephesians 3:14-21 Paul’s Prayer for Spiritual Growth to the Ephesians

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully? Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Please join together as we sing Hymn #_____
