

“On the First Day of the Week” by Dr. A. Just
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Thank you for this invitation to the Emmaus Conference. It is a great honor to be here with you.

Dr. Just: Thank you for guiding us on the journey with the Emmaus disciples, where we hear our Lord’s instruction concerning His Passion and Resurrection.

Numbers and structure

I have always found the Scriptural use of numbers fascinating and significant. Of course, we do not want to enter the realm of cabalism, but it is clear that certain recurrent numbers in Scripture have intentional significance, and that God uses certain numbers to instruct us or imprint truths on us.

When I show students how certain numbers are repeated so often in Scripture and seem to have a special usage, they very quickly find threes and sevens and forty’s appearing everywhere.

The number “three” is prominent not only in Scripture, but also in other aspects of human life. It makes me curious as to the imprint on the Trinity in our world and our life. Why are there three bears and three little pigs in fairy tales? Why do we treasure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Perhaps this significance is relevant even in Luke’s expression “the third day” and the Church’s Easter celebration.

Sentence and paragraph structure is another avenue for communicating a larger message. Dr. Just’s observations of chiasmic structures and transitional circles both in the Emmaus account and in the entire Gospel of Luke show how much of a literary masterpiece it really is. Tying together the first verses of Luke with these final accounts, showing the connection of Zechariah and Simeon and Anna’s waiting for the redemption of Israel with the Emmaus disciples’ seemingly lost hope affords the opportunity for revealing that the redemption is accomplished through the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unity of Scripture

This use of structure also goes beyond Luke's Gospel, as demonstrated with the parallels between Genesis 3 and the Emmaus account. The opening of Adam and Eve's eyes to sin parallels the opening of the disciples' eyes to the Savior.

I expected a stronger connection to be made between Jesus' statement that it was "necessary for the Christ to suffer these things," and the First Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, "you shall bruise His heel." It is mentioned only briefly. (Perhaps it is too obvious and easily presumed from the account.)

Seeing the resurrection as the new creation, the "eighth day," emphasizes the harmony and unity of Moses' and Luke's writings under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the unity of God's plan of salvation. Christ's conversation on the road, beginning with Moses and the Prophets, instructed the two disciples concerning this as well, and again demonstrates the unity and unanimity of the various Biblical writers through the centuries. Isaiah speaks and confesses the same things as Moses and David. God is the true Author not only of the words of Scripture, but of the plan of deliverance for His people, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Scripture is one and united in its message. "The Scripture cannot be broken," but must be fulfilled, by God's divine direction.

Sufficiency of Scripture

The essay brought to mind many doctrinal themes concerning Holy Scripture: the unity of Scripture (already discussed), the sufficiency of Scripture, and the Christ-centeredness of Scripture.

Clearly Christ's instruction of the two Emmaus disciples shows that the Old Testament proclaims the Gospel of salvation. They later reflect that already on the road their "hearts were burning within them." The Word of God is powerful in its proclamation, the Holy Spirit kindling faith through this holy instrument.

Dr. Just calls this catechesis preparatory to the opening of the disciples' eyes in the breaking of the bread. I think I understand his point here, and the Emmaus account is a unique event. I cannot imagine the Church without both Word and Sacrament. But the Word itself is sufficient to create faith and bring salvation, for the Word is Christ Himself.

The Emmaus disciples' Christology was deficient, as Dr. Just demonstrates, but they did have faith. They believed the Word of the Gospel as they had learned it and as Jesus continued to expound it to them on the road. This did become a part of their confession, and they learned and came to believe that their Prophet-Teacher Jesus was the promised Christ, who fulfilled these prophecies through His suffering, death, and resurrection. But it was not until the breaking of bread that they recognized that the One who was expounding these things to them was this very same Jesus, who now was no longer disappointment, but the true and sure hope of Israel, no longer a failed redeemer, but "He Himself" who freed them from their sins. And now they could fellowship with Him at the table. The instruction was preparatory to table fellowship and to recognizing Jesus, but it did already kindle and create in them faith in Jesus as the Messiah, so that their hearts burned within them. Scripture is efficacious and sufficient for this saving work and purpose. I would like to see this emphasis more in the presentation.

Christology as the heart of Scripture, and the Centrality of Justification

For Lutherans, the central doctrine of the Christian faith is justification by grace through faith for the sake of Christ.

The Christ who broke bread with the Emmaus disciples was the culmination of all messianic prophecy. He was the Prophet unlike any other, the eternally-begotten Son of God, who became Immanuel, God with us, and the Suffering Servant, who reconciles us to the Father.

The Passion and Resurrection of Christ are our redemption, the redemption longed for by Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, and these two disciples. This is expressed in Luke 24: 20, 22, and 23:

"The chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. ... Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive."

I would like to see more exposition of these verses and their significance. Though the disciples were confused at these events and their importance, they do confess what had happened, and through Jesus' in-

struction they learn their significance. They first learned the truths and then learned to embrace them. Perhaps this is an application of *lex orandi lex credendi* (“the law of praying is the law of believing”); they learned the right words and then came to believe and understand them. Like little children, we learn to mouth the words “Abba, Father,” and throughout our life we grow in our knowledge of God as Creator, Provider, Protector, and Redeemer, never exhausting in our words or thoughts the fullness of who God really is.

If we do not center our thoughts and our faith on Christ’s Passion and Resurrection, we have no hope, as Paul admonishes us: “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2); “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). Justification by grace through faith in Christ is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. Without a correct doctrine of justification, the Sacrament becomes nothing more than a memorial meal or becomes a continuing sacrifice for sins to complete Christ’s unfinished redemption of mankind. But when justification and redemption through Christ alone is proclaimed, then it is boldly and comfortingly proclaimed also in the Body and Blood given for us Christians to eat and to drink in the Sacrament of the Altar. Only then can Christ give Himself to us as the medicine of eternity and the feast of salvation.

Creedal and confessional statements

I was very intrigued by the uniqueness of Luke’s expression “on the third day.” It quickly brought to mind the Creeds of the Church, where we confess with regularity: “the third day He rose again.” It directed me also to the statement “whose kingdom shall have no end,” drawn from Luke 1:33 “and of His kingdom there shall be no end.” Perhaps this study has already been done, but I would like to explore more the influence of Luke’s gospel on the Creeds of the Church. This is, after all, the summary of our faith, central to what we believe is necessary for salvation, as the Athanasian Creed states it.

Timelessness of liturgical time, and a foretaste of eternity

I appreciate the consideration of the Emmaus account as a unique event, likewise the Last Supper with the institution of the Eucharist.

Scripture is not simply formulaic. We can recognize similarities among texts, but each one stands on its own merit and in its own context. Dr. Just rightly helps recognize that and keep it clear.

The closing verses of Luke with the seeming compression of events can be puzzling. The explanation that they are the beginning of a “new reckoning of time,” that they are in “eschatological time,” holds merit. From the time of Christ, the Church now lives in the “last days.”

In some senses, the Church is bound to time and space, as we gather here in this life around Word and Sacrament. But these things transport us out of time and space, and into eternity, connecting us with the saints throughout the world today, and saints who have gone before us and are now praising God “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.”

There is a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us (Heb. 12:1). Our eyes need to be opened to see them and to rejoice with them in the redemption through the blood of the Lamb; and with them our eyes need to be opened especially to recognize Christ who is among us with His Word and Sacraments that forgive our sins, strengthen our faith, and bring us to eternal life.

Dr. Just, thank you for this journey and this feast, and especially for directing our thoughts to Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Prophet proclaimed in Moses and the Prophets. It was necessary that He suffer and die for us, that He might be the Hope and Redemption of Israel.

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