

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 4 April 2021**

Children's Talk: Realising that We've Spent Time With the Lord

- It's Easter today and on Easter we talk a lot about the Lord.
 - I've got a question for you to think about.
 - You don't have to answer it but I do want you to just quietly think about it to yourself.
 - Have you ever spent time with the Lord?

- I want to read you a story about two of the Lord's disciples.
 - They weren't from the 12 disciples but they were some of His close followers.
 - On the morning that Jesus rose from the dead they were walking to a place called Emmaus.

- Luke 24:13-16 (NKJV, modified)
 - ¹³ Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And they talked together of all these things which had happened. ¹⁵ So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

- Did you hear who came and walked with them? (Jesus)
 - But they didn't realise that it was Him.
- So Jesus asks them what they're talking about and they explain that Jesus, who was a mighty prophet, was crucified.
 - And that that had destroyed all their hopes about what He was going to do for Israel.
 - And then they said that that morning some of the women had gone to the tomb and didn't find Jesus' body and they saw some angels who said that He was alive.
 - Then Jesus talks to them and He explains that everything that happened was as it was supposed to happen.
 - And it says, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (27).
 - And they still didn't recognise Him.
 - But they do soon; let's read the rest of the story.

- Luke 24:28-32 (NKJV, modified)
 - ²⁸ Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. ²⁹ But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.
 - ³⁰ Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.
 - ³² And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

- When did they finally recognise Him? (When He broke the bread and gave it to them.)

- And then, once He vanished, they thought back about their whole walk with Him, and they realised that they should have recognised that it was Him from how they were feeling when He was talking to them.
 - What did they say about how their hearts were feeling? (Their hearts burned within them.)
 - We can also recognise that the Lord has been with us when we look back on an experience.
 - We often can't tell as we're having the experience.
 - So we can look back on our experiences and look for times when our hearts burned within us.

- Can you think of when someone might have their heart burn within them?
 - Might be when reading the Word or listening to something from the Word and you have that feeling of "Oh, I get it! I understand now!"
 - That's a good, warm, excited feeling.
 - Or it might be when you've had the chance to do something helpful for someone else.
 - As you did it you might be feeling annoyed that you had to do it.
 - But, if you look back on it, did something feel good in your heart as you did it?
 - Or it could be a time when you've had a fight with someone—maybe a sibling or a parent—and you've both had a chance to calm down and talk about it and then you have a good long hug.
 - Can you remember what your heart feels like in those times?

- Those are special times and they're special because, even if we didn't see it at the time, those are times when the Lord has been with us.
 - Just like the disciples thought they were just walking along and talking to someone, it can be in normal day-to-day experiences.
 - But, when we look back, we can realise that the Lord has been with us.

- So, to celebrate Easter, take a bit of time to think back and find a time when your heart burned within you because the Lord was with you.

- *Amen.*

From Disbelief to Joy

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
4 April 2021

“Their words seemed to them like idle tales....”

- Why didn't the disciples believe the women who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead?
 - Surely, they should have expected it, right?
 - Jesus had told them multiple times what was going to happen.
 - They must have been just really slow to not get it.

- That's what I used to think before I really thought about what it would have been like for the disciples.
 - Let's do that work.
 - Today is Sunday.
 - Imagine how you would feel today, if just a few days ago you had experienced something horrific.
 - Just a few days before the disciples had to watch the kindest and best person they had ever met be brutally killed.
 - If that happened to me a few days ago, I would be barely functioning today.
 - I'd be in a *dwaal*—hardly able to remember to eat, crushed by grief, and just lost.
 - And so it actually makes a lot of sense that, when the women came and told the disciples that Jesus had risen, it says,
 - “And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11).
 - They were hearing what the women told them through the haze of grief and confusion.
 - When we're in that kind of a state, any idea that things might not be so bad or that they might get better seems like a fairytale.

 - What's your reaction if I say this to you:
 - You can have a strong, confident belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine and Human God.
 - You can be sure that He not only exists but also have a strong faith that He is caring for you and everyone you love and leading you in a good direction.
 - You can be confident that what He teaches is true and that the more you live according to what He teaches, the better things will be for you and for everyone.
 - You can have that kind of faith.

 - Does that sound true to you or does it sound like a fairytale?
 - I would guess that the people listening to this sermon are in a whole range of different places with their faith.
 - Some people probably feel pretty strong and peaceful in their faith.
 - Other people may be more at the stage of not even being sure that there *is* a God.

How Much Faith We Have Can Seem Like Its Outside of Our Control

- How much faith or belief we have can seem like it's outside of our control.
 - It can seem like a personality trait.
 - Some people are just cheerful or outgoing.
 - Other people seem to just believe in God easily.
 - Great for those people but what if you're not one of those people?
 - Or how much faith we have can feel like a mood.
 - We all like those times when we feel happy and optimistic, like everything is right with the world.
 - But what if you're not feeling like that?
 - What if instead you're feeling depressed and overwhelmed?
 - You can't just *decide* to feel better.
 - Can you just *decide* to have more faith in the Lord?
- Also, like the disciples who had just experienced something horrific, when we have experienced difficult things in our lives, it can be a lot harder for us to feel ok and cheerful.
- It can also be a lot harder for us to believe in and trust in God.
 - It's harder to believe that everything is going to be ok when you've personally experienced that things sometimes are really *not* ok.
- There are all sorts of reasons why it might be hard for us to have faith in the Lord.
 - And we can't just *decide* to have more faith in the Lord.
 - It doesn't work like that.
 - But we do have agency—there are things we can do.
 - The teachings of the New Church are clear on this.
 - For example, listen to this passage from the chapter on Faith in *True Christianity*:
 - *True Christianity* §356
 - We are able to acquire faith for ourselves. This is... clear from the fact that faith in its essence is truth and any of us can acquire truths for ourselves from the Word. As we acquire truths and love them, we begin to acquire faith.

Furthermore, if we were unable to acquire faith for ourselves, all the passages in the Word that command faith would be pointless.

- That makes sense, right?
 - We must be able to do something or otherwise it would just be cruel and entirely unfair of the Lord to command us to have faith and promise us that we can grow in our faith in His Word.
 - As just one example, when the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith," the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed"—meaning, if you have even the tiniest little bit of faith—"you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:5-6).
 - That's a beautiful promise from the Lord but only if it's actually possible for every single person to have faith and for that faith to increase.
- The disciples started in a place of disbelief but they gradually got to a place of believing in the Lord in His resurrection and even experienced great joy by the end of the story.
 - Is there a similar path open to you?

- Today, we're going to go through some of the story from the last chapter of the Gospel of Luke and see what we can learn from it about how our individual faith can grow and develop.
 - Listen for which part of the story resonates most with where you're at right now.

The Women Go to the Tomb First

- In the first part of the story a group of women go to the tomb early in the morning and discover that the stone has been rolled away from the door of the tomb and Jesus' body is not there.
- Then they see some angels who tell them that Jesus has risen from the dead and they remind them that Jesus had told them that He would rise on the third day.
- Last year the title of the Easter sermon was ["Why the Lord Appeared First to Mary Magdalene"](#).
 - And we said that, in this case, as in many other stories in the word, the women are symbolic of things of the heart within us and the men are symbolic of things of the head (see *Secrets of Heaven* §8337; *Apocalypse Explained* §270:2).
 - And so the overall message of that sermon was "If we want to see the Lord, it will be something in our heart that will do it first and our head will have to play catch up."
 - Because we focussed on that aspect last year, this year I want to focus on what the head catching up looks like.
 - And so we're going to jump into the story once the women have already played their role of going to the tomb first and then bringing the news to the disciples.

Peter Runs to the Tomb to See For Himself

- As we already saw, the disciples don't believe what the women tell them.
 - But that's not actually the full picture.
- Later the disciples on the road to Emmaus were still thinking about what the women said.
 - They hadn't dismissed it entirely—they just also weren't ready to fully believe it yet.
- And Peter goes to see for himself.
 - Luke 24:12 (NKJV, modified)
 - But Peter, standing up, ran up to the tomb, and stooping down, he saw the cloths lying by themselves; and he came away, marveling to himself at what had come to pass.
- Peter represents faith—when it is strong and clear—like when He was the only disciple to walk on the water to Jesus—and when it is weak and wavering—like when he became afraid and started to sink down in the water (Matthew 14:26-32).
 - Here faith goes to see for itself.
- And it's important that we do that too.
 - We don't gain a strong faith but just going off of what other people have said; we need to go see for ourselves and we need to then think about what we've seen for ourselves.
- It says that Peter came away, marveling to himself about what had come to pass.
- We need to do that marveling—that reflecting on our experience—because it's only then that we will be able to see the truth.
 - *Secrets of Heaven* §5684
 - [R]eflecting is turning one's attention, which is the sight of one's understanding, to observe whether something is true, and having done this to observe that it is indeed so.

- We're only going to see that what the Lord teaches is true if we take the time to turn attention to thinking about what the Lord teaches.
 - Like Peter, we need to mentally get up and go see.
 - We might not see the truth right away but it won't be possible at all unless we take the time to reflect on it.
- We see the need for reflection and the power of reflection in many places in this story.
 - Back when the women went to the tomb, the angels reminded them that Jesus had told them that the Son of Man must be crucified and rise again and then it says, "And they remembered His words" (Luke 24:8).
 - They knew that He had said that but they needing prompting to remember what they already knew.
 - We also see the power of reflecting in the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
 - So now let's read that story in more detail.

The Road to Emmaus

- The first thing that feels significant about this part of the story in understanding how our faith develops is the conversation between the two disciples.
 - It says, "And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them" (Luke 24:14-15).
 - They're discussing everything that has happened.
 - They're thinking it through.
 - Some translations even say that they were disputing with each other or arguing.
 - This is a really important part of developing faith.
 - We need to test out our theories on other people.
 - We need to argue and consider other points of view and think about it some more.
- There are limits to the usefulness of this—notice that they don't come to the right conclusions about what's happened without Jesus' help.
 - But they do figure out some important, foundational things.
- Jesus asks them what they're talking about and one named Cleopas explains all that has happened and he also says this about Jesus:
 - "And we hoped that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).
 - They had at least realised that their expectations about what Jesus was going to do were not going to come true—or at least not at all in the way that they expected them to.
 - And that's a really useful step.
 - It's really useful to reflect on where our expectations and reality have not lined up.
 - For example, we might realise after reflecting on a hard experience, "Oh, I had the expectation that if I tried hard to be a good person then nothing bad would ever happen to me or the people that I care about."
 - That's a painful realisation but it's also a really useful one for moving towards a more mature understanding of what the Lord's protection and providence really mean.

“O thoughtless, and slow of heart to believe....”

- After Cleopas finishes explaining what happened to Jesus then Jesus says, “O thoughtless, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25)
 - Imagine if you were struggling with your belief and someone called you thoughtless and slow of heart to believe.
 - Jesus seems to be saying that they had a head problem and a heart problem.
 - They could have known what was going to happen from the prophets but, on the head side, they did not give it enough thought and, on the heart side, they were slow to be willing to believe.
- If we want to grow in our faith then we need to spend time thinking about things having to do with faith.
 - Read, attend church, attend Bible Study, read religious books, *etc.*
 - We need to have some thoughts about religious things to work with.
- And on the heart side it sounds like we need to notice our resistance to believing.
 - We need to see that sometimes we are slow of heart to believe.

- Because it sounds like what Jesus is saying is that, if they had given it more thought and been more quick to believe in their hearts, then they would have understood what the Lord was doing when He died.
 - And it’s probably true of each of us too that our faith is less than it could be, given the opportunities we’ve been given.

- But, fortunately, the Lord Jesus Christ is there to help the disciples understand.
 - It says, “And beginning from Moses, and from all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).
 - He was taking them through scriptures that would have been familiar to them but now with a very different focus than they were used to.
 - He was teaching them truths for their minds and was also simultaneously touching their hearts—that’s why they later say, “did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

- We might feel, “Well, that’s great for the disciples that they could have that experience of having the Lord teach them directly but it’s not so easy for us.”
 - But remember that the disciples didn’t realise that it was Him teaching them at the time.
 - We might not realise when the Lord is teaching us and touching our hearts.
 - If we do our part to spend time trying to understand religious things and ask the Lord to help us understand and believe more, He will.

- The teachings of the New Church offer a simple formula for the development of faith.
 - *True Christianity* §347
 - As for the manner in which faith is formed, this happens by our turning to the Lord, learning truths from the Word, and living by those truths.

First of all, faith is formed by our turning to the Lord, because faith that is real, that is, faith that brings salvation, is faith from the Lord and faith in the Lord.

Second, faith is formed by our learning truths from the Word, because faith in its essence is truth. All the elements that constitute faith are truths. Faith, then, is

nothing but an array of truths shining in our mind. Truths teach not only that we need to have beliefs but also in whom to believe and what to believe.

Third, faith is formed by our living by those truths, because a spiritual life is a life that follows truths. Truths are not actually alive before they exist in actions. Truths dissociated from actions are just thoughts. The Lord says, "If you know these things, you are happy if you do them" (John 13:17).

- Can you see these three elements throughout the story that we've talked about so far?
 - Turning to the Lord, learning truths, and living according to them?
 - Maybe we haven't seen as much evidence of the importance of living according to the truth yet but we see it symbolically in the next part of the story.

"Stay with us...."

- The disciples on the road clearly wanted to receive as much as they could from the Lord.
 - They arrived in Emmaus and Jesus says that he's going to go on further but they press Him to stay with them.
 - And so He does stay with them and has a meal with them.
 - Luke 24:30-31
 - ³⁰ And it came to pass, as He reclined with them, taking bread, He blessed it; and breaking, gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He became invisible to them.
 - The teachings of the New Church explain the significance of this:
 - *Secrets of Heaven* §3863:14
 - [By this] was signified that the Lord appears by good, but not by truth without good....
- If we really want to see the Lord and have faith in Him then we need to want to break bread with Him.
 - We need to want to receive love from Him—love for other people.
 - And that has to include a willingness to use the Lord's truths to repent—to get our lives in order for the sake of other people.
 - We need to have a hunger to do what's right for other people.
 - We can see the disciples care for others in what they do next.
 - Even though they've just walked for seven miles and even though it's night time they get up right then and walk all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what they had just experienced.
- And part of what's interesting is that the story doesn't end there.
 - These disciples have made it, in some sense.
 - They approached the Lord (though without realising it at first).
 - They learned truths from Him.
 - And they seemed to be keen to put them into practice helping others.
 - And their faith was strong:
 - They now believe in Jesus' resurrection 100%.
 - And they've seen Jesus for themselves.
- But the story doesn't end there.
 - There are more developments.

- Jesus appears to the whole group and allows them to handle Him.
- He eats food in their presence.
- But I want to fast-forward to the end of what's recorded.

“Sit in the city of Jerusalem until you put on power from on high.”

- Jesus tells them that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).
- But, rather than sending them out right away, He says, “And behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but you sit in the city of Jerusalem, until you put on power from on high” (Luke 24:49).
 - This sounds like they still needed more reflection time.
- Sitting in the city of Jerusalem symbolically means spending time in the teachings of the church.
 - They needed to spend time thinking about all that the Lord had taught them.
 - They needed time for all of this to sink in.
 - They needed to wait till they really felt the presence of the Lord in what they were doing.
- So, even if you're pretty far on your faith journey, there will still be a need for sitting and waiting and reflecting sometimes.
 - If you're looking for a recommendation, I would recommend reading the chapter on Faith from *True Christianity*. (Download it for free: <https://swedenborg.com/product/true-christianity-1-nce/>)

Confidence and Joy

- After telling the disciples to stay in Jerusalem Jesus leads the disciples out, blesses them, and is brought up into heaven.
- And it says this:
 - Luke 24:52-53
 - “⁵² And they, having worshiped Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”
- So they got to that place of faith and confidence and joy in the Lord's salvation.
 - It wasn't that those hard things hadn't happened; they had happened.
 - And it wasn't that there weren't hard things to come; there were hard things still to come.
- But they had a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to help them get through whatever happened.
 - And the promise is that, no matter how we may be feeling today, we can gradually develop a faith like that to help us get through.
 - By learning truths and reflecting on the truths and reflecting on our experience, by trying to live according to those truths in love to other people and most of all by turning to the Lord and asking for His help.
- *Amen.*