

**19**

Apr

## Astounded Us

Stories That Matter

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A

Resurrection unsettles our certainty and invites us into astonishment. This week's worship explores how joy and disruption coexist as we live into the astounding news that Love has conquered death.

### REFERENCES

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalm 34:1-10

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

### COLORS

White

*Moreover, some women of our group astounded us (Luke 24:22 NRSV).*

So, why did they go, those two somewhat unknown disciples? Why did they make their way to Emmaus on that Sunday? We're on the third Sunday of Easter. Weeks have passed, and so much has happened since we were singing about that Resurrection morning. We're having trouble remembering all the emotions, all the "feels," as they say. It was so long ago in our fast-paced world. But it wasn't for them.

However, when our text begins this week, it says, "Now on that same day..." That same day. Wow, hard to imagine. It's hard to remember all that had happened in their lives. And then this last week, well, it is hard to sum it all up—all the ups and downs, all the joy and fear. The predicted end, the terrible death, the rolling away of the stone, and the posting of the guards seem to add an

exclamation point at the end of the sentence. It was done. Over and done. Hopes were dashed, and plans were erased. It was the worst day of their lives and the end of everything.

Yet, for some unexplainable reason, the sun rose again. They were sure it wouldn't, that the darkness had won, and their lot was to stumble in the gloom for as long as their breath lasted. With that sun came news—incomprehensible news, unbelievable news, astounding news. That's what they called it, these two on their way to Emmaus. They were *astounded*. Maybe that's why they left. Maybe that's why they hit the road and made an exit to the suburbs, a wayside town called Emmaus. They went because they were astounded and simply couldn't hold any more. They left before they burst in tears, in hope, in confusion. They left in their astonishment, their "astoundedness." They didn't know what else to do; they didn't know what might be next. They could no longer imagine their lives.

I remember the day my wife and I stood in a terminal at Chicago O'Hare airport and received a gift that would forever change our lives. Flying from South Korea was an infant child who would become our son. When the escort handed him to us, I knew I wasn't prepared for all that was to come. I was astounded by this news, this child, this change. You've had a day like that—a day when everything changed, and your brain couldn't handle it. Not completely. You had a glimpse, an astounding glimpse that something was happening.

"On that same day," Luke writes. That day. You remember that day—that day when everything changed. That day when the possibilities stretched out before you like a road to a new reality, a new you. That day. On that same day. Luke seems to be saying that Jesus had an agenda. You'd think rising from the dead would have been all that was on the list for the day. That's a full day, don't you think? Rise from the dead and then take it easy from there. Relax a bit. Take a nap; read a book. But no, rising from the dead was only the first thing on the list that day. *That day*.

On the Risen Christ's "to-do list" was meeting some guys on a road. They were heading to Emmaus. Why? We already admitted, no one knows! Maybe it was home. They thought the party was over, the curtain had come down, so they might as well go home and remember. Maybe that's what they were doing as they walked, rehearsing their favorite lines. Remember the bread and fish day? Of course, who could forget that? Yeah, that was a good day. "Who do you say I am?" Remember that one? Good old Peter, he's the one with all the answers. I was glad he broke the silence that day. Yeah, *that* day; that day was a hard day. Yeah, not like this one though. No, not like this one. There aren't any harder days than this one.

“Why?” The simple question startled them out of their remembrances. Why is this such a hard day? They hardly know how to answer. He must have beamed down from the moon, from another dimension of time and space. How could he not know? They told him in words that sound like a creed, words the church began to use, not the normal conversational answer to an honest question, but a declaration of faith—faith that wavered there at the end. “But we had hoped” (24:21). Here’s where it got real again. “We had hoped.” Then we were astounded. We heard strange stories we couldn’t believe. This day is the worst of all days.

It was his laughter at this that startled them most. “How foolish,” he chuckled. You had to know. What did they have to know? “Everything,” he told them, “Everything.” They were enraptured in spite of themselves, their grief forgotten, their despair set aside as they listened to him tell them what they already knew but had forgotten on that terrible day. He talked on and on, every book, every scroll, every story they thought they knew, but that now sounded new on that day. When they got to Emmaus, they didn’t want it to end, so they begged him to stay with them, to eat with them. They opened the door to their lives, and he walked in and sat down with them. Then, he took the bread and broke it.

Was it the words? The motion, the gestures? Was it the bread, tearing, breaking, scattering crumbs here and there and everywhere? They were astounded yet again. They felt it more than they saw it. Their hearts lit up; they talked about it when they could breathe again. “Were not our hearts burning?” They ran. Who decided? Which one? Who knows? Maybe their feet decided, maybe it was their burning hearts, but they ran all the way back to those who would understand how this day had become that day. That day when everything changed. When the world ended and started again. But now it was different. It was all different. That same day. That astounding day.

They walked into that room in Jerusalem, and everything was burning. Hearts were on fire before they got there to light them up. The Lord has risen indeed. “Yeah, we know,” they said with a grin they couldn’t remove. We know because we saw him. He came alongside. He taught us, then fed us. He was right there, then he wasn’t, but he is. He still is. Because he left something behind. Call it memory; call it hope; call it the Spirit, a presence that makes his absence less frightening. “We don’t know,” they said, shaking their heads, “but we know.” Then they laughed because they knew that made no sense. *We were astounded. We don’t know, but we know.* That same day, hope was made. A family was made; hungry hearts were satisfied on that day. You remember that day? That astounding day when the whole world changed? I do.

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