

IMPACT FIRST

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

April 19, 2026

Easter 3

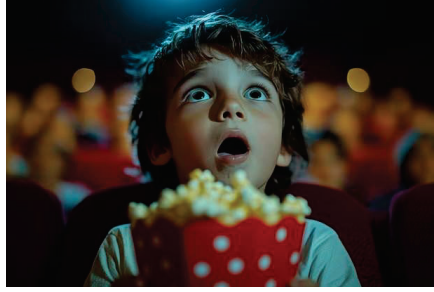
Acts 2:36-41

[Peter said,] “Therefore, let the whole House of Israel know beyond any doubt that God made this Jesus - whom you crucified - both Messiah and Sovereign.” When they heard this, they were deeply shaken. They asked Peter and the other disciples, “What are we to do?” Peter replied, “You must repent and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was to you and your children that the promise was made, and to all those still far off whom our God calls.” In support of his testimony, Peter used many other arguments and kept saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!” They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptized. That very day about three thousand were added to the number of those converted.

Luke 24:13-35

That same day, two of the disciples were making their way to a village called Emmaus - which was about seven miles from Jerusalem - discussing all that had happened as they went. While they were discussing these things, Jesus approached and began to walk along with them, though they were kept from recognizing Jesus, who asked them, “What are you two discussing as you go your way?” They stopped and looked sad. One of them, Cleopas by name, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened these past few days?” Jesus said to them, “What things?” They said, “About Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet powerful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people - how our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. We were hoping that he was the One who would set Israel free. Besides all this, today - the third day since these things happened - some women of our group have just brought us some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn and didn't find the body; they returned and informed us that they had seen a vision of angels, who declared that Jesus was alive. Some of our number went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said, but didn't find Jesus.” Then Jesus said to them, “What little sense you have! How slow are you to believe all that the prophets have announced! Didn't the Messiah have to undergo all this to enter glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of scripture which referred to the Messiah. By now they were near the village they were going to, and Jesus appeared to be going further. But they said eagerly, “Stay with us. It's nearly evening - the day is practically over.” So the savior went in and stayed with them. After sitting down with them to eat, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, and broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who immediately vanished from their sight. They said to one another, “Weren't our hearts burning inside as this one talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven and the rest of the company assembled. They were greeted with, “Christ has risen! It's true! Jesus has appeared to Simon!” Then the travelers recounted what had happened on the road, and how they had come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

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Some of you may know that my favorite singer-songwriter is an American folk singer named David Wilcox. I had a chance to see him for the first time since before covid just a few weeks ago. One of David Wilcox's songs is called *Eye of the Hurricane* and it's a song about driving a motorcycle. On the surface, it's about riding too fast on a very powerful motorcycle. Now, in the moment, when you're at that top speed, it seems like it's all calm and you're in control. But we all know that one tiny little variation in the surface of the road or something that comes in front of us that we're not quite sure about, some change in our plan, and it becomes obvious that we're really just on the edge of where the danger is. He says, it's like you're riding in the eye of a hurricane. There's a line in the song that says, *there's this place inside when you're moving, you can hide safe within the rain*. I used to believe when I was a kid that if you could run faster than the rain was falling, you wouldn't get wet. Now, I did my best to have this experiment, but I don't think I could ever start running fast enough. Now, the deeper meaning of David's song is that sometimes we live in very risky ways and we assume that there's not going to be any problem because we're in that bubble of safety just - enough distance away from the risk. And just because it hasn't become insurmountable yet, we assume there's no problems. Wilcox says that this song is actually about addiction.

It also reminds me of a joke a friend of mine used to tell where you'd be driving down the road and you'd come to a red light and you would just blow through it. Your companion says: "What are you doing?" You say, "That's okay. My brother does this all the time." Another red light straight through. "Don't worry. My brother does it all the time." All of a sudden, you come up to a green light and slam on the brake. "Why did you stop? It was green." "Well, my brother might be coming the other way."

When I've heard David Wilco sing *Eye of the Hurricane* live (and he did it again when I saw him in Seattle a few weeks ago), he often reminds the audience that it's not speed that kills, it's impact. I was thinking about that when Artemis II was floating down to Earth waiting for those parachutes to pop out.

An impact does mean *the force of one thing hitting another*... this moment of crash. But, impact also means having a strong influence - having a major effect. Impact is one of those words that we can use in conversations about death and danger and also about life and insight and enlightenment.

It had been a long Sunday for Cleopas. This follower of Jesus, like all those around him, was in deep grief. All because of Jesus' unexpected arrest late on Thursday, a speedy trial and execution on Friday before the sunset. It was the time of the Passover festival, normally a joyous time, a time of God's liberation, of God's bringing us into a new life beyond what has bound us before. And yet the joy of the Passover festival could not buy Cleopas' or any of their moods. In fact, Saturday - being a day of rest by statute - a forced day of rest simply made it a long day to endure alone with the grief.

And so the new week could not start fast enough and there must have been something of a relief as the sun rose on Sunday morning. And then they got their next surprise. Some of the women disciples had returned

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from their sad but important task of anointing Jesus' body for burial with the spices only to report that they couldn't find the body and instead actually saw angelic messengers. *Why are you looking for the living among the dead?* The angel said. *Didn't Jesus say that the Ben Adam, the Son of Man, the Chosen One must be handed over and crucified and then raised.* And yeah, maybe they remember Jesus saying some words like that, but those kind of things Jesus said always seemed hidden in mystery and not really practical. So Peter rushed to check out the women's story. And he confirms that there's no body, but Peter didn't see any angels. And in the end, the group kind of concluded that the women were just telling stories: nonsense, idle tales is the way that many translations have that.

And so we imagine that it's sometime after lunch that Cleopas and his friend leave Jerusalem to travel to their home in Emmaus, which is a town roughly 10 kilometers away. And I imagine the road on this Sunday was relatively busy with other travelers because there had been people from all over in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. And this was probably the first day that most people were heading back home. And so as we heard in the reading from Luke, these two disciples strike a conversation with a stranger on the road. Now the 10 kilometers would normally take someone, at a moderate pace, maybe up to two hours to travel depending upon the road. *So what are you talking about?* the stranger says. We might imply that the stranger heard a little bit about what they were talking about and maybe the stranger noticed the sad look on their faces, the lack of joy in their voice. And they say, *You must be the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been going on. All this big news about Jesus of Nazareth.* And the stranger says, *No, I haven't heard. Tell me about it.* And so they tell the story. *Jesus of Nazareth is this amazing prophet, this amazing teacher who did things with words and with his actions that were just so powerful that it was obvious that God was with this person. And people saw this and there was a hope amongst many of them that Jesus might liberate the people at this Passover time when they're talking about liberation that maybe Jesus will redeem the whole nation, set the nation free. But it all came crashing to an end when Jesus was arrested and executed.* And then Cleopas says, *And even worse, his body is gone. Now, some of the women in our group say that they heard angels tell them that Jesus was alive, but we can't prove that. We're just confused and we're sad.* And then the stranger opens up a deep scriptural, theological, political, prophetic dive into the messianic theology of the day. And this conversation reaches deep into Cleopas and Cleopas' friend's hearts. And it's so impactful that when they get to where they're going and their companion is going somewhere further, they don't want it to end. So they say, *It's late. Why don't you stay with us?* And they get to keep talking to this stranger. As we heard, the story is that, during supper, the guest offered the blessing over the meal, broke the bread and passed some to everyone around the table and suddenly their memories flooded back. Maybe memories stirred from even just a few days earlier when Jesus broke bread and said, "Take and eat. Do this in my memory." And they remembered this stranger was no stranger. This was Jesus. The idle tale wasn't idle at all. And then, in the mystery of the story, as soon as they realized this, Jesus is mysteriously gone.

Like the women several hours earlier, Cleopas and his friend get back on the road, maybe even it's getting dark by now, and rush back to the others in Jerusalem to tell them their version of the idle tale. But when they get there, they meet a more receptive room than Mary and the others heard in the morning. Because sometime after they left, someone named Simon (maybe Simon Peter or maybe a different Simon among the group) had their own experience of the risen Christ. A story that's not told anywhere in our gospels. I mean, if it's Peter, the last we hear of Peter is he goes to the tomb, sees the body is gone, sees only linen in the tomb, and he's amazed at no body being there, but he goes home and doesn't see angels. And then if it's the same Simon Peter, now we're being told Jesus appeared to Simon.

If we read a little bit further on in chapter 24, Luke goes on and tells stories very similar to what we heard last week from John (minus the Thomas details) where Jesus visits the whole group and says, "Peace be with

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you." And invites them to look and see his hands and his feet and to be touched. And like last week, Luke's gospel shares several examples of people when seeing was the key factor in believing.

But Cleopas has a different insight and realizes something else looking back at the whole experience. And yes, recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread was a moment of clarity. But it was really on the highway during the conversation with a stranger whom they didn't know where the impact began. *Weren't our hearts burning inside us when we were talking about the Messiah in scripture?* Their hearts burned long before they saw anything or believed in resurrection. You know, oftentimes, it takes a while for all of the pieces to fall together, but the change has often already begun before we see what we're looking at. Sometimes, by the time when things start to make sense, when we realize that this is not this moment alone, we also notice that a series of insights have become part of who we are leading up to whatever that moment. That instant of clarity is when we know that we're part of a bigger story. In fact, I might suggest that in most cases, I think for most of us, we're already being impacted before we realize it. Or if we realize something's going on, we might not be sure what it all means. Before Cleopas realized that Jesus had been their traveling companion, the conversation itself was impactful enough to want to spend more time with this stranger. The impact was already having an impact before they realized the full impact.

A personal story that I may have mentioned before: Patti and I had been in a long distance dating relationship for a couple of years while I lived in Swan Hills and Patti lived in Edmonton. And we were two introverts dating each other. So we didn't always express ourselves to each other in words. One night, I was kind of getting the vibes that maybe our future together wasn't all that hopeful and I went against all my instincts and after we'd kind of left I dropped her off at her place I actually went to a nearby pay phone (because that's what you did before cell phones: you could go and put a quarter in a machine and it would make a phone call with you). I just wanted to get to the bottom of it. And I realized and Patti realized that we both wanted a deeper commitment no matter how hidden we were letting that message be to each other. And we kind of had this moment of clarity. And I said something like, *Are we talking about what I think we're talking about? Maybe we should talk about that thing we're not talking about.* So, I went back to Patti's dad's place and she got in the car and we kind of had a mutual marriage proposal for each other. We went shopping for a ring the next day. We set a date. It was going to be about 13 months down the road because I had a cousin who was getting married the next summer and we didn't want to compete. Looking back, all of the signs were there. She and I could have already adjusting to what would become a long relationship evolving out of this long-distance dating. We just hadn't realized it yet. And it took a moment of clarity for it all to make sense.

As I mentioned last week, actual visits with the risen Christ were extremely rare and they were very time-limited. There was only a certain period of time, a matter of weeks, by the most accounts, of when it was possible. But the Christian movement grew after Jesus' death because the message became more prominent than the resurrection appearances. Our other reading today from the book of Acts is part of Simon Peter's sermon on Pentecost. And clearly Peter's words and message had an impact. The text claims that there were thousands of people who joined the movement as a result.

So when a message excites our hearts, when it stimulates our minds, it can entice us to become more involved. Like Cleopas and his friends, conversations sometimes can touch hearts. Experiences can touch hearts. Discussions on the road can begin to have an impact. Discussions that may lead to learning, to changing, and to growth. If someone or if something that we encounter excites us, it begins to burn inside our hearts to use the biblical language. It opens up for us new opportunities to further our experience of that which is mysterious and holy to learn more, to change more, and to grow more.

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I think it's Spirit of Hope's desire that when we come together as a community of faith that there is something about our coming together, maybe it's in words spoken or scriptures read or songs sung or moments of silence or just something that we don't know what it is yet, but it might become clear later. Something about our coming together sparks an excitement that invites us to want to go deeper. And so on this day, may we be open to the impactful encounters with those things that we have a willingness to see beyond and with our hearts that are open, our minds that are stimulated to being guided by the spirit beyond what we understand right now. Amen.

#182VU Stay With Us

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