

Advent Lutheran Church  
Opening Our Eyes  
April 27, 2025  
Luke 24:13-35

It was a cold Friday morning in January. Rush hour in Washington, D.C. was in full swing with people hurriedly moving through L'Enfant Plaza, one of the city's busiest metro stations.

At precisely 7:51 a.m., a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved tee-shirt, and a baseball cap took his position near the entrance. He opened a violin case, tossed in a few dollars and coins to get things started, and began to play.

Over the next 43 minutes he performed six classical pieces while 1,097 people passed by. Most folks moved past without slowing down or even looking in his direction. Of those that reacted, 27 showed their appreciation financially, giving a total of \$32.17. Only 7 people lingered to listen for a minute or longer.

There was no demographic pattern that distinguished the people who decided to watch or those chose to give money from that vast majority who hurried past. Whites, Blacks, and Asians; young and old; men and women; were represented in all three groups.

Actually, there was an exception. Every time a child walked past, the youngster tried to stop and watch. But every time the adult they were with had no interest in slowing down and compelled the child to continue on.

Musicians perform like this all the time. Some fare better financially than others. Which must make you wonder why I've opted to relate this account.

Well . . . for a few reasons. The musician was the world renowned, Grammy award winning violist Joshua Bell who just happened to be playing his Stradivarius. And, he was engaging

in this social experiment at the invitation of Gene Weingarten of the Washington Post.<sup>1</sup>

To prepare for the event, Gene had thought about every possibility. For example, crowd control. What would they do if the crowd started to grow and kept growing to the extent it was impeding the ability of many folks to commute?

That worry never materialized. In Joshua's incognito state it was almost as if he was invisible.

Except. Except there was one woman who did recognize him.

Stacy Furukawa, a demographer at the Commerce Department, arrived near the very end. She had no doubt it was him. She had seen him perform just a few weeks earlier. This setup made no sense, but she was glad to be a part and didn't want to miss the ending.

Stacy stood about 10 feet away, watching and listening, with a grin on her face. And after he played the final note, she walked up and introduced herself.<sup>2</sup>

Friends, of the more than 1,000 people who found themselves in the presence of this world class musician, only one recognized him for who he really was. Only Stacy knew Joshua by sight and sound.

Which brings me to us and our present situation. Last week more folks than I've ever seen here filled our sanctuary for Easter Sunday. People came for expecting certain sights and sounds. They came ready to experience the power of resurrection. We might go as far as to say people came ready to open their eyes anew to the miracle of Easter morning. Jesus was no longer in the tomb for he had risen.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Weingarten. "Pearls Before Breakfast: Can one of the nation's great musicians cut through the fog of a D.C. rush hour? Let's find out," April 8, 2007 - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> Washington Post. "Joshua Bell's Stop and Hear Music Experiment," April 10, 2007 - [https://youtu.be/hnOPu0\\_YWhw?si=2lxQsnMt-xbwUjuJ](https://youtu.be/hnOPu0_YWhw?si=2lxQsnMt-xbwUjuJ)

Today we are gathered once again. It is only 7 days later, but much has changed. First, many churches call today “Low Sunday” in recognition of the dramatic decline they experience in attendance. Next, we’ve had our Easter fix. Never mind that Eastertide or Easter Season continues for 50 days. And, finally, and redundantly, we live in an era of short attention spans. Almost everyone has returned to their normal Christian lives now.

Our Gospel today picks up with where we left off last Sunday. Today’s part of the story begins with two unnamed characters – people that we assume are men.

A few verses later we learn that one of the men is named Cleopas. This familiar story is one we can call Cleopas and Co. – not short for company but rather for companion.

Cleopas and his unnamed companion are traveling. And as they travel, they are joined by someone – a someone who doesn’t mind them continuing their conversation.

The walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus wasn’t a leisurely stroll around the neighborhood. This was a 7-mile-long road trip. So, even if their uninvited companion joined them a mile in, the trio would have walked together for 6 miles. At a decent pace that travel would have taken them nearly 3 of Joshua Bell’s performances.

In other words, there was plenty of time. Plenty of time to tell stories and share memories of Jesus. Plenty of time to observe the newcomer and to wonder about the questions he asked – and those he avoided.

All that walking yielded not a bit of recognizing. Not by the duo nor by any others who may have passed them by or overhead their stories. Instead, an invitation to extend the interaction lands Cleopas and his companion at the dinner table with their guest.

At the table their guest took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

Siblings in Christ I know you know that formula. I trust that those words are familiar to you.

For the two travelers this is when the fireworks went off.

A contemporary version of this passage begins the next verse with these words, "At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him."<sup>3</sup>

And today the men's story ends just like the women's story ended last week. Once they grasp that Jesus who was dead is alive again, they hurry to tell the others. In their case this takes significantly more effort. They set out immediately traveling back down the same 7 miles of road to the place where the 11 and the other disciples have gathered.

I've related two stories. In the first more than 1,000 people passed by, but only 1 recognized Joshua. In the second two men took 1,000 steps followed by 1,000 more over and over again, but it wasn't until the bread was broken that they recognized Jesus.

Recognition is often closer than we realize. Picture a child tugging at a parent's sleeve struggling to get them to slow down for a deeper experience of something special that they see and hear. Imagine two disciples whose hearts burn within them as they walk a familiar road unaware.

Recognition transforms. The world-class musician went unnoticed because people didn't expect such a sound in the corner of a metro station. And the risen Christ went unrecognized on the road to Emmaus because grief clouded the men's vision. But when their eyes were opened, everything changed.

That's the invitation before us today. To look again. To pause. To notice. Because resurrection isn't something to celebrate once a year; it is a reality we are called to live into every day.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:31, The Message

We at Advent Lutheran are a people who walk the road together. We ask questions. We wonder. We doubt. We hope. We serve. And in all of that, Jesus shows up in expected ways and in ways we can never imagine until we experience them.

Today I invite you to open your eyes and to keep them open. Expect to encounter Jesus every time you come to church and expect to see Jesus in every person you meet.

Then, like Cleopas and his companion, let that recognition move you to action. Go and tell the others – friends, family, and anyone who will listen.

Christ is risen. The world will never be the same.

Amen.