

# Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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I'll be honest, I missed Luke. We haven't heard from Luke since... Christmas Eve, and it's good to be back in my favorite gospel.

One thing I love is that Luke doesn't rush things after Jesus' crucifixion. Luke doesn't skip over the confusion or the grief. Rather, Luke shows us some disciples who were trying to make sense of what just happened, like Mary did at Jesus's birth. And right at the center of today's reading is the line: "We had hoped." That might be one of the most honest sentences in all of scripture. Not "we believe." Not "we trust." Not even "we still hope." Just—we had hoped.

And if we're honest, most of us know exactly what that feels like. We had hoped that broken relationships would be restored. We had hoped the right leaders would fix things. We had hoped policies would protect people. We had hoped that people would do the right thing. We had hoped the systems would hold. And sometimes—maybe even most times—they don't.

And the thing is—the disciples' hope wasn't ridiculous. They hoped for liberation. They hoped for justice. They hoped for things to change. That's not naïve, that's simply being human. But they also hoped for it on their own terms. They hoped for a certain kind of power. A certain kind of victory. A certain kind of future that made sense to them.

And we do the same thing. We attach our deepest hopes to people, to movements, to parties, to policies— and then we're surprised when they can't carry the weight of saving us. Every election cycle... every headline... every AI-created image that tries to wrap political power in the language—or even the likeness—of Jesus...it reminds us how easy it is to confuse God's vision with our agendas and with the agendas of a nation or political leader.

And I'll say this personally: As a queer person, I had hoped. I had hoped that things were changing in the world. That we had turned a corner. That the arc was bending, slowly but surely, toward dignity and protection and belonging for all. And in some ways, it has. But in other ways... that hope has taken a hit. Because what we're seeing right now—especially toward trans people, but really across the whole queer community—is a wave of legislation, rhetoric, and fear that is real and growing. And that's not my subjective thoughts; rather, the ACLU tracked 76 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills in 2018, and last year it bloomed into 616 bills. This year, there are already 519 already with a significant amount of time remaining.<sup>1</sup> You see, this is not abstract. It's people's lives. It's dignity. It's safety. So yeah... *we had hoped*.

And here's what's striking about today's gospel story: Jesus showed up... and nothing changed. At least not at first. Those two disciples were talking with him. Listening to him. They were literally walking with the risen Christ—and all the while, they were still living in a world of "*we had hoped*." Because resurrection doesn't look like what they expected. And, even when Jesus opened the scriptures to them—they still didn't get it. Which is maybe a good reminder: resurrection isn't about having a deep knowledge of the Bible. It

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2026>

isn't about having the right interpretation. It's not about getting your theology perfectly lined up. Because it's not in the Scriptures, the interpretation, or the theology that they come to experience the risen Christ. It was at a table.

For they invited a stranger in. They made room. They shared a meal. And in that moment when they sat down together, when they shared bread, when they lived the kind of life Jesus had been showing them all along...that's when they began to understand what God had already done. That is when resurrection was noticed. That's when new life became real. They recognized Christ when they lived like Christ.

And this is where Luke is crystal clear. Because in Luke, you don't find Jesus ruling over at the top. You find him at the table. With people who didn't belong. With people who had been pushed out. With people no one else made room for. So when a church says everyone belongs—not just in theory, but in practice... When immigrants are welcomed as neighbors, not treated as problems... When accessibility isn't an afterthought but a commitment... When queer and trans people aren't debated, but embraced as beloved... all of that is not politics dressed up as faith. All of it is simply Luke's gospel enacted.

And that brings us to this table. Because this matters for what we do every time we gather. This table, Christ's table, is not about having the right answer. It's not about proving your belief. It's not about earning anything. Rather, this is where Christ does the work. This is where Christ meets us. In simple bread and special wine. Because Christ is not found in an idea. Not in some symbol. But Christ is found in a very real presence you can taste, touch, feel, and see. Just like on that road— Christ is made known in the

breaking of the bread. Not because we figured it out. But because Christ is already here with us.

And that's also why we have to be honest about something. Whenever faith gets used to prop up power— whenever Jesus gets turned into a symbol for someone else's agenda— whenever religion becomes a tool to exclude or divide— we've stepped away from Christ's table. Because a table of insults is not Christ's table, no matter how a generated image might want our leaders to look like Christ. For a table set in places of power, violence, control, and lies is not Christ's table. The table Jesus set looks different. It was marked by generosity. By peacemaking. By humility. By honesty about our own hypocrisy. By care for those pushed aside. That's how Christ shows up.

In today's gospel, Christ's resurrection didn't give them back the hope they lost. It gave them an entirely different way of hoping. Not in outcomes. Not in control. Not in getting things to go our way. But in a Christ who keeps showing up— in shared meals, in communities that make room for one another, in people who refuse to let the most vulnerable be pushed aside. And that is why what we say really matters. Because when we say we are a Reconciling in Christ congregation— that's not a statement we put on a website. That's a table we commit to. A table where people who have been told they don't belong—feel belonging. A table where dignity is not debated— it's assumed. A table where love is not conditional— it's practiced.

So if you, like me, find yourself saying, "*we had hoped*"... you're not as far from resurrection as you think. Because that's exactly where Jesus met the disciples. And it's exactly where Christ meets us. So, come join me at Christ

table. Come break bread. Come experience the resurrection found in sharing together. Amen.