

The War is Already Won

Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter

Main Text: Luke 24:13–35 **Supporting Texts:** Acts 2:14a, 36–41 | 1 Peter 1:17–25

On March 9, 1974, a man named Hiroo Onoda emerged from the jungle on the Philippine island of Lubang. He was gaunt. His uniform was rotting off his body. His rifle was still loaded. He had spent twenty-nine years — from the final months of World War II until that very morning — fighting a war the world had long since declared over. He had seen the leaflets dropped from airplanes. He had found the newspapers left for him. His own family had called to him through loudspeakers at the jungle’s edge. He dismissed every message as enemy propaganda. His mission was to fight, and fight he would.

He wasn’t deranged. He was loyal — heartbreakingly loyal to a story that had stopped being true decades before.

Only one thing reached him. In 1974, his former commanding officer — Major Yoshimi Taniguchi, now a gray-haired man running a small bookshop — flew to Lubang, walked into that jungle, found Onoda, and spoke the words face to face: “The war is over. You are relieved of your duty.” Only then did Onoda lay down his rifle. Only then did he weep. Not when he read it. Not when he heard it from strangers. Only when his commander came to him personally and said: it is finished.

Now let me tell you about two men walking a road.

It is the afternoon of the first Easter Sunday. Two disciples — one named Cleopas, the other unnamed, perhaps standing in for all of us — are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Seven miles. And they are walking away. Away from the tomb. Away from the upper room. Away from everything they had hoped in. Three years of following Jesus, believing He would redeem Israel — and then a cross, a sealed stone, and silence.

Yes, the women had spoken of angels. Yes, the tomb was empty. But they processed that news the way Onoda processed the leaflets: too good to be true. Too strange to trust. As far as they could tell, the war was lost. They were heading to Emmaus because there was nowhere else to go.

Here is where we must be honest. God the Father has spoken His will clearly: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. Trust His word. Walk in hope. Live as the sons and daughters you were made to be — children of the King, created to reflect His glory.

This is not a burden imposed on strangers. It is the life of a family — the household of a Father who loves His children and knows what makes them flourish.

And from the first moment that order was broken — in the garden, when humanity listened to the wrong voice — God spoke a promise. He said to the serpent: “He will crush your head” (Genesis 3:15). From the beginning, the Father was writing the rescue.

But look at us. We are Cleopas on that road. When plans collapse, when the world turns hostile, when despair meets us first thing in the morning — we walk toward Emmaus. We give up on prayer. We trust our resources more than His providence. We scroll past suffering because it interrupts our comfort. We love God in theory and ourselves in practice. We hear His Word on Sunday and ignore it on Monday.

The Apostle Peter says it plainly: we have conducted ourselves in ignorance (1 Peter 1:18). Not innocent ignorance — willful. We knew the road. We chose Emmaus anyway.

And on Pentecost, Peter declared: “God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus — whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). That charge does not stay in the past. Every act of faithlessness, every moment we lived as though God’s promise were not enough — we were there at that cross.

We are those men walking the wrong direction, carrying a story we have told ourselves too many times: God is probably not enough. The war is probably lost. And then a stranger comes alongside them.

“What is this conversation you are holding as you walk?”

They stop. Cleopas is astonished. “Are you the only visitor who does not know what has happened?” They pour out their grief. And then the stranger speaks — and everything begins to change:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter His glory?”

Beginning with Moses — beginning with the garden and that first promise — He unfolds the Scriptures. He is the seed of the woman. The Passover lamb. The bronze serpent lifted up for healing. The suffering servant, wounded for our transgressions. Every thread had been pointing here.

But their eyes are still closed. Not until they reach the village. Not until they urge Him to stay. Not until He sits at table, takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to them. Then their eyes were opened.

This is not incidental. This is how Christ works. The risen Lord has promised to make Himself known in the breaking of bread. Here, at this table, He comes to you personally. Not through a leaflet. Not from a distance. He comes in, with, and under bread and wine — His true body and blood — and He speaks directly: the war is over. You are forgiven. You are relieved.

The debt of every sin — from your deepest failures to the quiet compromises of this past week — is washed away. Not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19).

This is what absolution and the Lord’s Supper do: they deliver Christ to you. And your sins are gone.

What did Cleopas do when his eyes were opened?

They rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. Seven miles. In the dark. Running back toward what they had abandoned.

That is what the living Christ does. He does not merely inform you — He turns you around. “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road?”

That burning is the Holy Spirit at work. And this is now your life — not as a condition of forgiveness, but as its result. The law that once condemned you now guides you as one who is redeemed.

Love your neighbor, because you have been loved at infinite cost. Give, because you have been given everything. Speak truth, because the Truth has spoken to you.

Go back to Jerusalem — to your work, your home, your daily life — and tell what happened on the road, and how He was made known in the breaking of bread.

The world is full of Hiroo Onodas. People fighting wars Christ has already won. People walking toward Emmaus, carrying burdens they were never meant to carry.

They will not believe a leaflet. They may not believe a voice at a distance. But they might believe you — a person whose life has changed, whose heart is burning, whose story is no longer the same.

The war is already won. Your commander has come to you in person. Lay down the rifle. Turn around. Go tell them.