

NEVER GIVE UP HOPE

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35 k

On the Road to Emmaus

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing Him. ¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still; their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ “What things?” He asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him; ²¹ but we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find His body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said He was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” ²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if He were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged Him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So, He went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” ³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them,

assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke the bread.

These are the words of the Lord.

On a Sunday, about 2000 years ago, two disciples were walking down the road. It might have been two men, or a man and wife. They were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, about seven miles. It was a walk of despair, for their hopes and dreams were gone.

Everything they were feeling was in that one statement: “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

WE HAD HOPED...

How many of us haven't said something like that especially over the last weeks:

We had hoped...

We had hoped that this Covid 19 would end soon and a cure would be found,

We had hoped our children would be protected and our marriage would survive, the loved one would be healed.

We had hoped the headaches would go away, the stress would fade, the load would be lifted.

We had hoped the business would do well,

We had hoped the Easter bunny would have delivered a bigger nest egg for retirement.

We had hoped the world would find peace and prosperity for all, and worries would be gone.

We had hoped the kids would be more settled, and we could relax and enjoy life.

We had hoped that these years would be the good years, the years we dreamed about.

“We had hoped...,” they said, but the disciples hope was dead. They had pinned their hopes on a prophet named Jesus, but he was dead; killed on Friday, by the most horrid method known to humanity.

And on that Sunday morning, they were going back to their dull, lifeless, too-routine lives.

But Jesus doesn't want that to happen, not to them, and not to us! Jesus wants to keep the door of hope open, so he joins them; there, on their journey of hopelessness.

JESUS OPENED THE CONVERSATION

In verse 17 He asked them, “***What are you discussing together as you walk along?***” They stood still; their faces downcast. Jesus already knew what they were discussing! But He wants in and He wants them to open up to Him.

I wonder whether this morning, Jesus would say to us, “Let's talk.” Let's talk about the crisis that fills our thoughts, so we can hardly think about anything else. Let's talk about the emotions we don't even share with our family. Let's talk about the fear, the bitterness, the shame, the doubt.

When Jesus asked, “***What are you discussing?***” ***they stood still, with a sad look on their faces.***” They assumed that the man talking with them was uninformed about the crucifixion, so they told Him what had happened. Jesus just let them talk:

One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” He asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him; but we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.”

Their answer revealed a lot about their expectations of Jesus, and about their faith in God. They knew Jesus as a man from Nazareth, a prophet, with amazing words and deeds. But they had hoped He was more than just a prophet. They had hoped He was the promised Messiah, the ruler who would redeem Israel. They may have been looking for a Messiah who would drive out the Roman oppressors, and rescue God's chosen people from a life of poverty and struggle.

They thought Jesus might be the one who would redeem Israel. When He healed the sick, cast out the forces of evil, they believed in the God who saves. When He took on the pompous Pharisees, and taught the people with such wisdom and grace, they saw a true prophet. When He talked of the kingdom of God, they thought He must be planning to re-establish the throne of David.

But now He was dead; dead at the hands of the Romans; dead by the scheming of religious authorities. "We had hoped, but those hopes died with Him."

"We had hoped" We, you and I, had hoped that the world be fixed by now; that science and technological and medical progress would have overcome this terrible Covid 19, this poverty, and injustice. We had hoped that people would be better: our families, our heroes, our leaders, our friends. We had hoped that we would be better, even while we know our failings.

Jesus is listening, as we tell Him our hopes and dreams.

After the two disciples shared their dashed hopes, Jesus shared the depths of God's plan for salvation.

JESUS OPENED THE SCRIPTURES.

Luke 24:25-27: 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

I wonder what Jesus said to them about the Messiah.

Maybe He started at the beginning: how Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with God and the world, until their sin forced them out of the garden, into a world of pain and suffering. I suppose He talked about God's covenant with Abraham, promising to bless all people through him and his family. I suppose He talked about the strife in Abraham's family, and how they ended up as slaves in Egypt. I suppose He talked about how God REDEEMED His people from slavery, saving them by the blood of a lamb, bringing them through the sea, and feeding them in the wilderness. Perhaps He talked about the Messiah as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

I imagine He spoke of the servant songs of Isaiah 42-53, which prophesied that the Messiah, representing God's chosen people, would suffer. I imagine He quoted from *Isaiah 53:3-12*, ***“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain....Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed...After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.”***

Perhaps He spoke to them of the greatest messianic hope of the Old Testament, as stated in *Psalms 16:9-11*, ***“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”***

As Jesus spoke, the lights were coming on. As they said later, ***“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”***

When Jesus is with us, the Holy Spirit opens the Bible for us. We understand how sin and evil have corrupted the world, leading to pain and alienation and confusion;

globally as well as personally. We understand the continued failure of God's people, including ourselves, and we long for salvation: forgiveness, righteousness, and justice. We understand that to fix all that is wrong, the Son of God entered the world, to suffer and die, and then rise to life, defeating sin and evil and death itself.

We understand that Jesus died as the Lamb of God, the atoning sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. We understand that Jesus is the true prophet, who speaks the authority of God. We understand that Jesus is the true king, who brought the first fruits of the kingdom to earth and will come again to reign forever in a kingdom of righteous, peace and joy.

We understand all that, because we have the rest of the story, the New Testament!

But even today as we understand all that, we still say, "We had hoped!" We had hoped that sin would be gone, evil eliminated, and righteousness established. We had hoped that our world would be set right.

Understanding is not enough. Even while the lights came on, this men on that road were still thinking, "What difference does it make? Jesus is dead. We had hoped He would be the Redeemer."

Jesus had opened the conversation, and He had opened the Scriptures. One more thing was necessary:

JESUS OPENED THEIR EYES

Read Luke 24:28-32.

Why hadn't they recognized Him? Were His nail-scarred hands hidden beneath His robe? Were they not close enough to Him to be familiar with His voice? Or was it something else?

Why is it, that when we need Jesus most, it is hard to recognize Him. We wallow in disappointment, self-pity, even panic. We are so busy, with so many things on our minds, that it hard for us to listen for the Spirit of Christ. We are so focused on what we need to do to fix our problems and make things right, that we don't recognize Jesus with us.

That's human nature, I suppose. The two disciples were so focused on putting their lives back together, that they didn't recognize Jesus right next to them. Yet they did one thing right: They invited Him to stay with them. Was it simply hospitality to a guest, or was there something more? Was there something they couldn't quite pin down, a feeling they couldn't shake?

They put together a simple supper. He sat with them and gave the blessing. And as He looked toward heaven, and broke the bread, they saw! Was it His nail-scarred hands, His eyes, the peace in His face, or something more?

"It is Jesus! He is alive!!!" The hope He was describing was not just words; it had substance. The missing piece of God's plan of redemption is in place: He is not dead, He is alive!

Just like that, He's gone. At once, they are out the door, no longer tired, as they race the 7 miles to Jerusalem.

By the time they arrive, the resurrection is old news, for Peter has also seen Jesus. While they are all still talking, Jesus appears, saying, "***Look at my hands and feet. Touch me and see.***" He eats some broiled fish, revealing that his resurrected body is more real than ever! Yes, Jesus' spiritual body was more, not less, as He passed through the wall as if they were only vapor.

Cleopas and his companion listened, as Jesus filled in the disciples.

Read Luke 24:44-49.

Jesus is alive, and because Jesus lives, hope is alive.

"We had hoped!"

We all have hopes; hopes that might seem unfulfilled at times. When we do, Jesus opens the conversation. "We need to talk," He says. We need to talk about our life, our false expectations, our obsession with our own wants and needs, and our doubts and fears.

Jesus opens the Scriptures. Maybe our knowledge is limited to a few stories: Moses, David, Daniel, Jonah. Maybe the story is too familiar; we know all the stories, without really understanding. Maybe, like me, you are sometimes “slow of heart” slow to see the connection between the plan of God and our reality and hopes.

Jesus opens our eyes to see Him as the risen Lord. It would be nice to see Him break bread and see Him eat fish, but we don’t have that.

Here’s what we do have: two disciples who had lost all hope, against all expectation met Jesus alive on the road. Their story rings true, because it is honest about their struggle to see and believe.

Other accounts in the gospels also ring true: Women as witnesses, the suspense of the empty tomb, and the initial doubt of the apostles, who tell the story. The fact that the apostles needed to have Scriptures explained to them. The change from a defeated few, to people who would die for Christ. Did Jesus rise from the dead, or didn’t he? No question is more important! If He did not, there is no real hope for the world, or for us.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14, ***“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”***

But if Jesus is alive, our hope is alive. 1 Peter 1:3 says, ***“He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”***

We have just celebrated Easter and Jesus, through his Spirit, meets us today.

Where are you on your journey? Are you just beginning a conversation with Jesus? That’s OK; open up where you are in real life. Are you opening the Scriptures? Open your Bible on your own each day. We have time these days because we cannot be out and about. Take time to read and study the scriptures as never before. Are your eyes being opened, even today? Today, you can experience the joy those two people knew.

Jesus is alive, and that makes hope come alive!

Let us pray:

Precious and loving God, we come to You today with praise and thanksgiving for all You do for us. You love us as You loved Your own Son. You care for us as You did to your own Son those many years ago.

We thank You for sending Him those many years ago, that we might be saved and washed in His shed blood.

O God, we pray that we may never forsake the means of grace that You have granted to us. Keep us true to the way of prayer, to the reading of scripture and of welcoming both friends and strangers into our homes and our hearts. We pray that as Christ appeared on the road to Emmaus, so He might appear to us and through us to others as we share the joys and concerns, we have and as we hear and speak your Word.

Lord, today we pray for those in our church and our community who are troubled and upset as were the disciples on that road to Emmaus. We hold before you those who experiencing the grief of losing that which is important to them; that which has helped shape their lives; whether it's their health, a job, a home, a way of life, or a loved one. Grant that they may encounter the Risen Christ and know that the future is safe in his hands.

Lord, we pray for those who reach out in our church and our community to minister to others of your healing presence. We pray today, in the midst of this pandemic, for those who listen; for those who counsel; for those who share Your word and for all those who deliver food to the hungry and the needy. Bless them in their love that they may ever more fully experience the love that they share.

We pray today for the leaders of countries around this world. Give them the wisdom and the guidance they need to make the tough decisions that need to be made during this crisis.

We pray as well for all the care givers who are looking after the sick and the confined. Keep them safe as they put their own lives in jeopardy to care for others. We pray also for those people affected by that terrible shooting rampage in Nova Scotia. We pray for the souls of those killed that they may have known You and we pray also for the families and friends left behind to deal with the grief and the loss of loved ones.

We ask all these things and we give You our deepest and most profound thanks for being with us and listening to us and granting us peace, through Jesus Christ, our Risen Saviour who taught us to call upon you saying: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen

BENEDICTION

Go in peace and may the Word of God stir your hearts and your minds. May the love of Christ Jesus light your path each day and may the power of the Holy Spirit uphold you and give to you every spiritual blessing, both now and forevermore.

Amen