

Third Weekend of Easter (RCL/A): "We Had Hoped: the Disciples from Emmaus and Us"  
Luke 24:13-35  
April 22-23, 2023  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

When's the last time you said, "I'd been hoping that...."?

- "I'd been hoping that it would be warm and sunny, so I could garden" – or "play golf" – or "host the party outdoors." "And instead it poured."
- "I'd been hoping that the boss would understand." "And instead I got written up."
- "I'd been hoping that I'd make the team." "And I didn't." "I'd been hoping the coach would put me in." "And instead I warmed the bench."
- "I'd been hoping the biopsy would be negative." "And it wasn't."
- "We'd been hoping he was the Messiah." "And apparently he's NOT. They crucified him. Now he's dead and buried, along with our hopes."

You've gotta love these folks on the road home to Emmaus. People who know these things tell us they may very well have been a married couple – walking 7 miles home from Jerusalem, where they had gone to celebrate Passover, and where they had watched in horror as Jesus of Nazareth, their hoped-for Messiah, was arrested and killed. They're walking at a snail's pace, weighed down by a great sadness, hearts heavy because the new beginning they welcomed had morphed into a terrible ending.

It was so clear that Jesus was special, set apart in his holiness, in his power, in his preaching and his healing. After a thousand year wait, it looked like the promised Messiah had arrived to save the Jewish people! But apparently they'd gotten it all wrong, because now Jesus was as dead as one of the nails used to crucify him. Neither he nor his followers were taking a victory lap. They were all walking in a funeral procession. Like us when we've suffered a really great loss, a devastatingly deep cut, they couldn't think or talk about anything else. At least stretching their legs on the road home was better than sitting in a cramped room stale with despair.

Then they hear footsteps approaching from behind; a stranger overtakes them and keeps pace with them. He doesn't look threatening and it's still daylight, so they're not alarmed. He's the first to speak: "So, what're you talking about so intently?" That stops them in their tracks. *"They stood still, looking sad."* (Luke 24:17c) I like the way *The Message* puts it, though: *"They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend."* Which of course they **had!**

There's this weird detail that **they don't recognize Jesus**, standing right beside them. One scholar points out that Emmaus is west of Jerusalem, so maybe the setting sun blinded Cleopas and his companion to Jesus' identity.... But that doesn't explain why Mary Magdalene had mistaken the risen Lord for the **gardener** on Easter morning (unless she was blinded by the **rising** sun ☺) or why, at a later date, the disciples fishing in a boat don't recognize their risen Lord standing on the land and calling out to them.

It's a mystery why they're kept from knowing Him, but there's a beautiful explanation of how they wake up and realize Who has been walking with them on the Way:

*They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done. So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared...*

*They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together...*

*Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.*

(Luke 24:28-31, 33, 35, *The Message*)

In retrospect, looking back, they realize they'd kinda recognized Him earlier, too. They ask each other, *"Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scripture for us?"* (Luke 24:32) When they'd finish telling the so-called stranger how

they'd put all their eggs in the wrong basket, how their hopes had been dashed, He recalled for them how Hebrew Scripture foretold not just the Messiah's coming, but His suffering and death. **He pried open a door of hope in their hearts** that perhaps God was at work after all in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

The scales fall from their eyes; it all becomes clear to them when He takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, gives it to them. 'Sure suggests that these two were present at the Last Supper when He did the same, saying, *"This is my body, given for you."* (Luke 22:19)

We are here today because we, too, recognize Him in the breaking of the bread, and because we are intent on obeying His command, "Do this in remembrance of Me." We weren't at the **Last** Supper, but here we are at the **Lord's** Supper. And most of us have never walked the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but we all know the pain of dashed hopes and hopefully the comfort God gives through Word & Sacrament.

Truth in advertising: at times we've **all** thought, "But I don't really 'get' this Word [with a capital W], I don't begin to understand what it meant then and what it could possibly have to do with me now." We'd like to sign up for a walk with Jesus, so He could explain it to us! He foresaw our confusion, though, and so He "gifts" us with the Holy Spirit, in Holy Baptism and throughout our lives, the dear, divine Teacher, the One who makes our darkness bright, Giver of the peace-that-passes-understanding in our most difficult moments, Tutor of our hearts.

I certainly don't understand every word of Scripture. Some of it's contradictory, some of it is very dry, some parts contradict each other, and not all of it has the same weight in our life of faith. It's a lifelong journey and an ongoing privilege to "dwell in the Word," though, sip nectar from it as if it were a honeysuckle blossom, feel it clobber us on

other occasions, keep coming back to the same passage in different chapters of our lives, and finding that, like a true classic, there is always more treasure to be mined. Even for those of us who know with certainty we wouldn't get to first base in a Bible trivia contest ☺, the Holy Spirit gives us opportunities to put our toe in the water....

Christ in Our Home has 1 verse, 1 paragraph reflections to give us insight. Product commercial ☺: we provide these free for anyone who would like one! Many sermons are mini-Bible studies, too, like today's, so just by being in worship we are meeting the Word, and hopefully taking away soul nourishment. There's always the video option of *The Chosen* series, also. Yes, it's Hollywood, but it makes Jesus, His mother, His friends, His followers, His antagonists, come to life on the screen. We dissect each episode, sharing our reactions, comparing it to the actual stories in the Bible, calling out artistic license, and challenging each other to dwell in the Word in a new and fresh way. The fact that our conversation is ecumenical makes it even more interesting. Fr. Bill and I aren't quite Siskel & Ebert, but we have fun as we teach and learn.

Jesus took the initiative by catching up with Cleopas and his companion on the road, and then **they** took the initiative by inviting Him to stay for dinner. Jesus takes the initiative by inviting us to share in this Holy Supper and we respond by showing up. Some days our prayers begin, "We had hoped" and we ask for comfort, and other days we arrive with happy hearts because of realized hopes. In Word & Sacrament God's love flows to us in **all** the seasons of our lives, through **all** the ups and downs. May our hearts burn within us as we hear the Word, and may we recognize our risen Lord and Savior in the breaking of the bread. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

