

Our Need for Healing and Hope
Luke 24:13-35 2020

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV)

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

And so the struggle we share against the Corona-virus goes on.

We continue to social-distance and do without familiar things.
Businesses deemed non-essential by politicians remain closed.
Students and teachers are missing the physical presence of friends
while they are all figuring out how to do virtual education.

At this point,
even introverts might welcome a face-to-face conversation,
as many are suffering with cabin-fever & boredom of isolation.

For all of us,
despite the schedules and plans we made for March and April,
our lives have turned out to be something quite different,
and on into May and June we still don't know what to expect,
which psychiatrists say **adds to our stress, tension & discomfort.**

I especially grieve with our seniors graduating from high school,
who'd hoped to spend these final months of school with friends,
had plans and expectations of attending their prom activities,
and were looking forward to hearing cheers of support
while walking across the stage to receive their diploma.

We continue to endure and try to make the best of difficult days,
when we had expected and hoped for so much better and more...
... and none of us thought it would turn out this way.

With our lives still on hold, most of us just want this to end,
to escape this reality of depravation, danger and disinfected,
and return to our normal, predicable and carefree living.
That's probably pretty close to how Cleopas and his companion
felt along their journey, traveling home on the road to Emmaus.

Just one week earlier,
they may have been part of the Palm Sunday procession,
celebrating the triumphant entry of Jesus into the city
anticipating victory amid all those shouts of joy,
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Perhaps they had noticed the growing conflict and hostility
between Jesus and the religious authorities,
**but nothing could have prepared them for
the sudden and devastating events of Friday.**

How agonizingly long, painful and awful the next day must have been
that Saturday of their Sabbath, a day to focus on the Lord,
but amid such extreme disappointment and crushed dreams,
where was God in this, and how could God let this happen?

**Finally, on the next day they could travel back home to Emmaus...
... to get away so that they could think and process it,
and go someplace where maybe the pain wasn't so raw,
where maybe in time, they could put life back together again.**

They had hoped and believed that Jesus was the Messiah,
the one who would defeat and end the hated Roman occupation.

For any Jew, their greatest and brightest hope,
their greatest desire was for the long-promised Messiah—
-- the One whom they assumed would restore Israel,
back to the glorious days of King David's kingdom.
Surely the Messiah sent by God meant victory over their oppressors.

But their savior had been betrayed, scourged and crucified...

... and no doubt you could see their broken & crushed disappointment,
and the devastation of their hope, aspirations and dreams
as they trudged dejectedly down the road toward Emmaus.

You can almost hear the grief in their words of vs. 21:
But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

What a haunting phrase of loss and despair, "but we had hoped..."

but we had hoped, and built our lives on Jesus and his ministry.
but we had hoped, and left our occupations and homes to follow him.

Yes, we had hoped,
but now that hope has turned to grief, defeat and despair...
... so we are leaving Jerusalem and going home to Emmaus.

But Emmaus is a lot more than just a location found on a map...

... **Emmaus is where we go when life gets to be too much for us.**
It's where we go when we feel lost, abandoned and alone,
to escape and get away to nurse our hurts and wounds.

Emmaus is the place of lost hope, shattered dreams & heavy hearts.

It's where you retreat from defeat, tragedy and disappointment,
a state of mind characterized by absence of anticipation & joy.
It's where you cry in need of comfort, renewal and some Good News,
against a haunting question, what if this is as good as it gets?

But as they are traveling along the road toward Emmaus,
they are joined by their risen Lord, **but don't even know it.**

Luke, as the storyteller seems to stress the irony, of Jesus,
the only one who really understands all that happened,
asking the travelers, "what things took place in Jerusalem?"

It is interesting that when Jesus asks,
they correctly recount all the facts about what had gone on,
including the empty tomb, the vision of angels,
and even the testimony of the women who saw Jesus,
-- and yet they do not understand -- they do not believe...

... they still don't see or appreciate what is going on,
or even recognize that it is Jesus walking & talking with them.

vs. 25-26

Jesus said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

In Greek, several words that can be translated, "foolish or fool".

The one used here specifically describes when you miss the point.

It's when you don't recognize something or connect the dots...

... **you're looking at it, but not seeing or understanding it.**

Often times when we are struggling with a loss or disappointment,
we can become so obsessed with our own disasters and problems,
and so dwell on the hurts & issues & failures of our lives,

that we actually miss seeing the presence of Jesus
right there walking & talking and comforting us,

Yes, grace is present, but we just don't notice or recognize it.

Yes, the resurrected Jesus is present and holding us close,
but in fear, trepidation and preoccupation with our problems,
we don't notice the good and blessings all around us,
the power and mercy of God who supports and sustains us always.

This story of the walk to Emmaus

is far more than just a simple resurrection appearance story.

It is the story of our faith journey, our life with Jesus
where there are hurts, disasters and disappointments,
where do we struggle with broken dreams and failed hopes...

... **and the grace present is the promise, truth and assurance**
that Jesus is with us always, and walking with us always,

even when we don't see or recognize him right away.

It is amid our most fearful disasters and deepest disappointments
that we **MOST** need to be conscious of God's abiding presence,
which is the message and point of the rest of this story.

1st when they invite Jesus to stay with them,
following customary Middle Eastern hospitality,
they invite their guest to break the bread, vs. 30
"he took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them"

**In the fellowship of the meal they share together,
they suddenly recognize Jesus, before he vanishes.**

The words, "he took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them"
are the same words used to describe
the feeding of the 4000 and 5000, at the Last Supper ...

... Luke wants us to understand that
**we are present with Jesus at the sacrament of Communion,
and that is the mystery of fellowship we share at the Table.**

2nd The next message and point of this story,
was the presence of Jesus in the interpretation of Scripture,
as later they recognized
that Jesus had shown them how all through Scripture
the focus is teaching about God's gracious love
as it's revealed through Jesus Christ, vs. 32
"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the
scriptures to us?"

3rd The final teaching message and the point of this story
is that the gracious presence of Jesus is with them,
through the faithful interpretation of Scripture,
and in sharing the meal and fellowship of Communion...
... then their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus,
and in response, they rushed off to tell others the Good News.

Luke wants us to know through this story,
that as we travel along our life's journey
we recognize Jesus in word, in sacrament, and witness ...

**... and the story about their walk to Emmaus,
is the story of our God who will not abandon or leave us alone,
but walks with us through all our broken dreams and losses,
and is accomplishing far more than we see or comprehend.**

That plaintive cry, "**but I had hoped**" from our road of Emmaus
is where Jesus comes to us and ministers to us in our need,
**making every trial and trouble somehow a gift,
an opportunity to discover what God wants us to see.**

Emmaus is when and where Jesus comes and walks with us,
which connects with the hope and promise of Christmas,
his name Emmanuel, which means *God with us* is fulfilled.
The answer to Emmaus is Emmanuel, our God with us and our God for us.

It's always been my experience, that God is most present with me
during my darkest, most difficult and troubling seasons of life,
for in the midst of my life's most terrible storms of disaster,
I find my Lord is the comforting & sustaining One walking with me.

So whatever shadows are currenting darkening our lives,
trust the Light that overcomes and dispels the darkness,
as the Apostle Paul wrote, 2 Corinthians 4:6

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light
of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Fellow travelers, as we walk along our life's roads of Emmaus,
consider these words of promise and hope from Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you
discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my
ways. I come to the end—I am still with you.

I don't have an easy answer to the troubles and trials of this day,
and I don't know yet the benefit and blessing God intends for us.
BUT I do know for certain that our God is with us,
and the best way to dispel our fear, anxiety, sadness & sense loss,
**is to search for signs of God's love and grace at work
through our active & trusting & grateful heartfelt faith.**

Perhaps our task today
is to open our eyes and hearts to God's Presence, **and consider:**
will I submit to the will, purpose and timing of the Lord,
who is always present and faithful, with me and for me?
Will I seek, trust and receive the graciousness of God this day?