

April 26, 2020
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Luke 24:13-35 We had hoped...
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 24:13-35 New Revised Standard Version

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.

There is a wonderful prayer to say in the evening called the Collect for the Presence of Christ in the Book of Common Prayer. Join me as we pray, "Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen."

Have you ever been broken-hearted? The disciples were broken-hearted after everything that had happened to Jesus on Good Friday. Two of them were on their way out of town, making their way to Emmaus, just hours after the women had found the empty tomb. They were talking about everything that had happened. The two men were walking and talking when Jesus joins them. They don't realize that it is Jesus, the risen Christ, and they give him the one minute summary of Jesus. He was a prophet mighty in deed and word, and the chief priests and leaders had him killed. Then they say three little words, "we had hoped." They had hoped he would have been the one to save Israel but instead he died a horrible death. We had hoped.

We have to remind ourselves that we live in an Easter world where Christ is risen. A world where love comes up beside us and walks with us. Even though the two disciples were walking right next to the risen Christ, they didn't recognize him. Jesus had to intervene, it wasn't until the breaking of the bread that they knew it was Jesus.

Jesus shares food and it reminds them of who Jesus is. How can we open our eyes to see Jesus right here and right now? Christ was made known in the home of their disciples. It wasn't at church, it wasn't somewhere special. It was in their own home as they shared food. Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. It reminded them of Jesus feeding the 5000, of people sharing their food and an abundant meal for all people. It reminded them of the night

before Jesus died when he shared that last meal with them. Sometimes we need simple, real things like bread to open our eyes to Christ.

This story sounds differently with all that is going on in our world. How can we open our eyes to see Jesus now? There are so many elements of life that we miss: travel, meals with friends, going to restaurants, having Communion as a family of faith. You may not be able to come here to church, but this crisis has helped us all realize that we have a church in each of our homes. We can have spiritual growth even when we are sheltering in place in our own homes. We can open the scriptures by ourselves in our own homes. We can see the risen Christ right here and right now.

This story shows us that sometimes we need Jesus to intervene to help us see the risen Christ. When we do recognize Jesus, we have that wonderful moment of discovery. Boredom is high during the quarantine. The other day Everett, our eleven-year-old, wanted to make cookies. There have been many cookies in the quarantine. While we were baking, his eyes started to twinkle. He wanted to hide the cookies and then make a scavenger hunt for Lee and Madeleine to find them. Boredom was gone and cookies were discovered. While it was not the same level of excitement as the disciples felt, our hearts did not burn within us, but there was a wonderful moment of discovery. It was so much fun and everyone laughed.

I think it is important that our story happened on a road. It wasn't on a mountain top or in a garden. It wasn't on the side of the sea or in any of the other places we expect revelation to take place. It happens on a road with a conversation. It happens to two disciples who were disappointed, who didn't know their Bible, who didn't recognize the risen Christ even when they are walking right beside him. It happens to two disciples who had given up and were headed back home.

Sometimes it is easy for us to see Jesus, but sometimes it is not. Sometimes it takes longer. Sometimes we will not see Jesus but we will get glimpses. Sometimes it may feel like bread crumbs of hope. Sometimes the move from doubt, fear, and grief to faith, hope, and love takes the time it takes to walk from one town to another with an open and honest conversation.

This has been a time when so many have been honest about fears and their disappointments. We have grieved with graduates who won't be able to walk the stage in the way that they had hoped. We have grieved about missed proms and postponed weddings and funerals limited to ten people. We can be as honest about our disappointments and grief as the two disciples walking on the road that day. We had hoped. Those are sad words, but Jesus teaches us that it is okay to say our sad words. We had hoped coronavirus would be gone by now. We had hoped people would not have lost their jobs. We had hoped that people would not have died from this dreadful virus.

It is okay to hope and when our hopes don't happen it hurts. When Jesus walks alongside the two disciples he asks them to talk about their pain and their loss. Then, he talked to them about the scriptures. Then, he broke bread with them. Before we explain, before we talk, Jesus shows us what to do. We walk alongside. We listen. We invite people to talk about their pain and their grief and we don't try to fix it. We sit with them in their sadness and we hold space. We say things like, "I'm so sorry that this is happening to you. This is awful." Suffering should never be done alone. When we give God our pain, our hurt, and our sadness, God holds it tenderly. God is here and we are loved. That is the good news.

There is a wonderful song that we have heard in this place before when our beautiful Chancel Choir sang it. The music was written by Mark Miller but the words were found left on the basement of a church in Cologne, Germany. Jews were hiding in the basement of that church

and those words were left as an affirmation of faith in God and as a call to conviction for the Christians at that church. The words are “I believe in the sun, even when it’s not shining. I believe in love, even when I don’t feel it. I believe in God, even when God is silent.” That is hope. God comes to us not in power, but in vulnerability. Christ is a suffering servant.

Wise John Thornburg asked a question recently. What are you learning about yourself during this time? I am learning that I need to name my grief, my pain, my disappointment, my fear in the safety of this community of faith because when I do, just like the two men that day, I am surprised once again by God’s presence and love. Our grief is real and understandable and it is not our only reality. God’s promise of grace and forgiveness and acceptance can help us make room for a new reality with hearts burning within us. Hope is naming the One in whom we place our trust even when it’s hard to see what’s ahead. Just like the disciples we are on a road, and it might feel like we are only halfway there, but Jesus is walking with us. When we are overcome by our “we had hoped” feelings of loss, remember we are not alone.

From dashed hopes to burning hearts. From disappointment to joy. From the cross to the empty tomb. From death to life. That is the Christian life. Let’s get walking on the road. Jesus walks with us. Thanks be to God, Amen.