

“We Had Hoped”

1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-28

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This week we will begin a **journey** down a lonely stretch of **road** that leads to a little village just outside Jerusalem called “Emmaus” on the afternoon and evening of Resurrection Day... i.e. Easter. I say ‘begin’ because today will be the ‘first installment’ of two parts to this well-known story. ONE that has become such a *central* part of the Gospel story that an entire Spiritual growth movement has been named after it: “*Walk to Emmaus.*” A Methodist retreat that is very closely related to our Presbyterian Pilgrimage... aka, ‘Cursillo.’ Today’s pivotal experience of those bewildered disciples... in the wake of an event that was at once both deliriously joyful and downright disturbing... is such a seminal moment in their growth that I will be dividing it up into two parts.

‘First part, sounds like...’ There are only three travelers to begin this first part of the story: Two followers of The Man from Galilee, part of the second ‘recruiting class’ of Christ; and later on in their trip, Jesus Himself. As I said, this encounter takes place in the afternoon... only hours after Mary and the others had found the burial tomb to be empty. Therefore, it should come as no surprise >> that they were, in those opening words of this passage, “***talking with each other about all these things that had happened.***” (Luke 24:14)

In the midst of their conversation, we read that “***Jesus himself came near and went with them.***” (Luke 24:15) Which leads to the first puzzling part of this passage: “***...but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.***” (Luke 24:16) “***Kept.***” ‘Kept’ by whom? By God? By their own will? There is no definitive answer. It could have been that they just **weren’t ready** to engage the Christ yet. Or, that they just didn’t realize who it was ‘out of context.’ They weren’t expecting to encounter the risen Christ so far removed from the city streets and empty tomb. Simply suffice it to say that they **just didn’t know any better...**

Then comes a question which sounds odd for Jesus to say, but not for the ‘stranger’ that those two ‘junior disciples’ thought that they had met. ‘*What were y’all talking about?*’ (‘DSV’ Bible Translation... ‘Deep South Version’ ☺) To which one of them... the only one named, “Cleopas”... gives a reply that I cannot HELP but read with a sarcastic tone: “***Are you the ONLY stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the ‘things’ that have taken place there in these days?***” (Luke 24:18) ‘Duh, man.. don’t you know *anything?*’ [attitude] So when Jesus ‘plays’

this guy like a Stradavarius, hooking him like a bigmouth bass, saying **“What ‘things?’”** this guy Cleopas must have wondered what rock this ‘stranger’ had just crawled out from under. Jesus, OF COURSE, knew EXACTLY ‘what things.’ He wanted to hear what this ‘follower’ would have to say. The Teacher was merely administering an ‘exam’ to see how much one of His ‘students’ had actually learned.

And Cleopas did fairly well. No doubt Jesus WAS **“mighty in deed and word.”** There was no denying that the **“chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death women of our group astounded us.”**

From the women who served Jesus on his time on earth right up to the crucifixion... to the empty tomb... to ones who serve, and teach, and pray in these VERY DAYS... I would echo Cleopas’ words: ‘some women of our group astound ME!’

There were, however, many ways that this ‘neophyte’ disciple failed his ‘exam.’ Even from the very first phrase where he refers to those ‘things’ about **“Jesus of Nazareth.”** Describing him in terms of his *earthly, temporary* home address rather than his permanent one. Using one’s hometown was quite common practice at that time... for ‘mere mortals.’ I think that **“Jesus, the Son of God”** would have been much more ‘entirely accurate.’

Such emphasis on Christ’s **humanity** would go along well with describing his ‘job description’ as **“Prophet.”** Now, maybe if he had expanded that to **‘Prophet, Priest, and King.’** But leaving it only as ‘prophet’ takes away SO much from the extent of his greatness. While there were certainly great men of God who shared in that title... Moses, Isaiah, Elijah, to name a few... but they all pale in comparison to the **“King of kings and Lord of lords”...**

But, perhaps what is MOST telling about the extent to which these two disciples (and the ones that awaited them on up in Emmaus?) had been **‘kept from knowing him’** was what followed the statement about Jesus being crucified.

‘WE HAD HOPED’ that he was the one to redeem [set free] Israel... and, besides all this, it is now the THIRD DAY since these things took place.” (Luke 24:21)

Now, I know that I have added my own ‘prejudicial’ tone-of-voice, but does this statement sound live a very positive, optimistic outlook on just what that ‘empty tomb’ really

MEANT? I sure don't hear any encouraging references to 'resurrection,' being 'raised from the dead,' 'conquering death,' etc., etc...

And THEN, Cleopas ends by saying that some of the disciples went to the tomb, finding it just as those 'astounding' women said, "**but they did not see him.**" (v24)

It sure sounds like to me that no matter the preponderance of evidence to validate what Jesus had been saying all along... that he would have to suffer death, and then be raised on the third day... they STILL DIDN'T FULLY BELIEVE.

Maybe they subscribed to that old saying... not SURE that it has its roots in 1st C. Middle East... *'If it sounds too good to be true... it usually IS.'*

It would appear to me that Jesus sure didn't 'feel the love' for their apparent lack of faith. Usually when one starts out a sentence by saying "**How FOOLISH you are, and how SLOW OF HEART...**" that's NOT a good indication of a very high 'approval rating.' Jesus chastises them for "(believing) **all that the prophets have declared!**" He challenges them with the 'rhetorical' question:

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" I'm thinking about now Cleopas is regretting his earlier snappy comment about this 'stranger' 'not knowing the things that have taken place'...

So why was Jesus so hard on them to "**believe the prophets?**" After all, did not Jesus himself say "**I have not come to abolish them (the Law and the Prophets) but fulfill them.**" (Matthew 5:17) Well, there's not a clear consensus on this amongst scholars, but what I think Jesus is getting across to these relatively new converts is that they, as well as those revered ancient prophets, were operating on '**incomplete information.**' They had not be privy to, in legal terms, 'full disclosure' of God's purpose and plan. Neither of them had 'all the facts' concerning Jesus. ("Dagnet?" *"The facts, ma'am, just the facts"*)

That while there was indeed MUCH O.T. prophecy that pointed to the coming Messiah, not ALL of the Hebrew Scriptures was directly relative to "the King of the Jews." Yes, in Timothy's words, "**All of Scripture is God-breathed, and useful for teaching...**" (2 Tim. 3:16) But not necessarily to teach about Christ. Now, to teach how to LIVE as Christ...? Sure. But, the Law and the Prophets are 'incomplete' without Christ. One cannot fully, completely

comprehend the truths in the O.T. unless read through the 'lens' of the eyes of Christ in the New...

As you and I travel down that road to faith that is our own personal 'walk to Emmaus,' let us learn from those who have gone before. Disciples who just weren't fully prepared to speak about Christ, but boldly did so anyway. Not knowing that the Teacher was right there in front of them.

May we consider how we are **Cleopas**. Not one of THE Twelve. Not a 'first round draft choice' of Jesus. A 'one-hit wonder.' Yet the central human character in one of the most important experiences in the Gospels. A flawed follower of Christ whose name could be translated "*Glory to the Father.*" Hmmm... May we be careful to not let our own **arrogance** in the **faith**... yes, I used the words 'faith' and 'arrogance' in the same breath... lead us to 'cop an attitude' with those we may THINK are inferior, not knowing ANYTHING about Christ. We just might be surprised as to what they know about that 'stranger' named Jesus...

May we never fall prey to the world's 'misinformation' that Jesus was a mere man, really good guy with amazing interpersonal skills... He is THE SON OF GOD. That just like Cleopas, sometimes we too are being 'tested' to see what our answer will be. Like prayer... not that God needs to know... but to know that WE know. Our faith in Christ cannot be limited simply to what we have READ or HEARD... but more importantly, what we have SEEN and EXPERIENCED ... in the faces and lives of those we encounter in our everyday journey of life.

I would leave you with this last question: If someone would ask you, 'Do you believe in heaven... a place beyond this fragile, finite body we occupy for a short time... and that because of a Savior Jesus you will one day live there ... what would you say? 'I sure HOPE so?' Believe me, I have had conversations with those when I asked about how they felt about their eternal destiny, that's exactly what they said. 'I sure HOPE so.' NO! Our faith has got to be rooted in something more certain than a 'gee whiz, I sure hope so!' At a time in our world history when the certainty of DEATH is staring us in the face, let us look to the Author of LIFE for our trust, our certainty.

Let us consider the contemporary truth of those ancient words of Peter that we read earlier: *"Live in reverent fear during the time of your 'exile'...* (that time when you are

separated from those you love)... *know that you were ransomed* (a great price paid for your life)... *with the precious blood of Christ.*" THAT *"through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, SO THAT your faith and HOPE are set on God."* (1 Peter 1:17-21) Building on the mission... and mistakes... of flawed disciples like Cleopas, may our faith, in the words of that favorite hymn, be **"built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness"**... and something SO much more than, 'Well... *we had 'hoped'*...

CHARGE: You may recall the last line of today's reading from Luke's Gospel:

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on." It goes on to say that *"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." (Luke 24:28-29) We can learn a lot from today's passage. Whether or not they had the full story right or not, Cleopas still opened up to who was, in his mind at least, a perfect stranger.

And then after just a relatively **short while**, felt **close enough** to **invite** this 'stranger' to **join him** and his 'BFF's' in their **home**. Maybe because as they **looked in his eyes**, even in their '**limited vision**' those two did indeed **'SEE' Jesus**.

May **WE TOO** have our **eyes 'opened'** to the **presence** of **Jesus** in the **eyes of strangers**. Ones who **need us** to **'open up'** to them about our FAITH in the Risen Lord. Even when we might not have all of the story straight. **Strangers** who become **friends**, whom we need to **'invite in,'** because **'the day is almost over'**.

**As we consider how in the world we are going to have the confidence
To broach a subject as personal as about our Christian faith,
May we know that we do NOT do so alone.
But that the Spirit of the Living God is above us...**