

Luke 24:13-35—Open My Eyes to See Jesus

What a day! Well, what a last few days. You know how it is to hope for something and then it doesn't actually happen. You know what it's like to have that hope balloon burst and it feels like the wind is knocked out of you left with the question, "Well, now what?" When hopes go unfulfilled or unrealized it can be devastating.

Cleopas and his friend were making their way back to a village called Emmaus. As friends do while traveling, they are talking and, at times, their discussion gets a little heated. Did one of them believe what the women had reported they had found earlier that Sunday morning? Was the other one skeptical because, well, dead bodies don't just go up and disappear? Were they going back and forth reminding each other, "Yeah, but remember when Jesus said this?" And the other saying, "Yeah, I know that, but we both know Jesus died!" Were they arguing over what they were supposed to do next? We don't know how the conversation went but they are so zoned in they barely notice when he starts walking along with them. The stranger wants to know, "What are you guys discussing?"

It's an innocent enough question but it stops them in their tracks. You could tell from their sad and gloomy looks that something was weighing heavily upon them. Cleopas can't understand, "**Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?**" To which the stranger replies: "**What things?**"

The two explain: "Well, there was this man Jesus from the town of Nazareth. He was a prophet. He spoke incredibly, powerfully, before God and all people. You should have seen the crowds that would gather to hear him. You should have seen the amazing things he did. People would come to him with all sorts of diseases and problems and the compassion he had and shared! People blind from birth went home seeing for the first time. The lame and disabled walked home without a pain or ache. And what he taught, it wasn't like the chief priests and leaders. He spoke of God forgiving sins, freely, to the worst of sinners! But then the chief priests and leaders had him arrested, handed him over to those Romans to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. You don't come back from something like that! We had these hopes that he would be the One. We hoped he was the Chosen One who would set Israel free. What they did to him destroys a man. The shame and disgrace, you can't follow someone who was crucified; you don't want to be connected with that. You don't come back from that. But he's been dead for three days. Then just this morning some women amazed us. They went to the tomb and supposedly they saw angels who said he was alive. Then some other guys went and, sure enough, Jesus' body wasn't there just like the women said."

It's no wonder their faces are gloomy. They don't know what to believe or think. They had these hopes! But, as far as they were concerned, what they were hoping for had no chance of happening.

We are on our own walk; we put one foot in front of the other one day at a time. Along this walk we have our own hopes, a lot of different hopes. You have hopes that your life will look a certain way with experiences you would like to have and achievements you would like to enjoy. You have hopes for your loved ones, your children, and grandchildren that their lives would look and be a certain way. You hope that tomorrow will be better or, at least, not worse than today or too much for you to handle. You hope you make the best and right decision. You hope that you learn from your mistakes and not fall into them again. You hope that you don't hurt him or disappoint her. You know the hopes you have.

Like Cleopas and his friend, you have hopes about Jesus too. You may hope Jesus allows all those hopes to become your reality. You may hope that he fixes your relationships with your spouse, with your children, your family and friends—get her to understand, make him listen. You may hope Jesus is the one to see you free from the financial stress and the never-ending questions. You may hope Jesus will set our country free from whatever you are most afraid of what's going on today. You might hope that he frees you from uncertainty and shows you: this is the decision you should make. You might hope he comes back soon or he takes you to be with him soon. You may hope he not take someone from you too soon.

But when those hopes go unfulfilled, when those hopes don't come the way we would like or when we would like them to, it can be quite devastating. Are we like Cleopas and his friend seemingly stuck on Calvary and Good Friday? It's all too easy for us to allow our personal wants, expectations, and hopes to cloud our minds to miss the point of this dying Jesus on the cross. We want him to do more right now. We want him to fulfill it differently tomorrow. But is that shamed Jesus what I really need now?

“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” Like those disciples we sometimes seem to think we have it all figured out. We even know the right words to say and have the information in our head. But we are so slow to believe left blind and confused.

Jesus doesn't leave us like that. Instead, he takes us back to where we need to be: God's Word. **“Did not the Messiah—God's Chosen One—have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”**

There, in the Word, he opens our eyes to see this is what is needed for you! True God from eternity did not take on flesh and blood just to do some powerful things

and speak powerful words. He didn't come to be a teacher—although he still does. He didn't come to take away and fix all your problems—while at the same time he is the solution to them. He didn't come to fix this world and be glorified butler at your beck-and-call. Yes, he cares about those things. Yes, he works to give you all you need for body and life. But he came to be so much more. He came to suffer. He came to save us from it. He came to give you hope.

So, we go back to Moses and the Prophets and see already in the Garden of Eden God clearly states what his Promised One would do. Yes, this Promised One would have his heel bruised; he would suffer. But he does it to crush Satan's head and destroy his work. Moses lifted up the snake in the desert to save the people; so, the Son of Man was lifted up on that shameful cross that all who believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life. The Psalm writer explained that the cords of death entangle him (Psalm 116). Another psalmist made it clear that God's Chosen One would be rejected (Psalm 118). The prophet Isaiah described God's suffering servant stricken, smitten, and afflicted despised and rejected by men and God. Jesus needed to suffer a shameful, naked death because my sins and yours are shameful. They stain us. They leave scars. They shame others. They hurt more. We stand naked before God trying to cover our shame with excuses and promises to do better; but it doesn't help and only makes it worse.

And so, it was necessary for God's holy one with flesh and blood to suffer in order to save you and me with flesh and blood. So, he is pierced and still has the nail-holes to prove. So, he is crushed under God's wrath and forsaken as he endures the hell we deserve. He became sin for us. And in its place Jesus' perfect life now covers you—he draped his robes of righteousness over you when he washed you of that shameful sin in those waters of baptism. Why? Because he is God's Chosen One and he did come to set you free. It cost him greatly; not silver or gold but his precious blood. He was chosen before the creation of the world and His work is revealed to you in the empty tomb. And now you are free—free from sin's control and Satan's power. Free from fear of death and the grave. Free to serve God as you serve each other. Free with the sure hope that because Jesus' lives God is on your side, giving you every good thing, and working all for your good. If Jesus had not suffered, we would have no hope! If Jesus had remained in the tomb, we would have even less. But Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!

I wonder, what was it that Jesus said to Cleopas and his friend in that 7-mile walk? He who is the Master Teacher gave them quite the Bible Study! But, perhaps, Luke doesn't record it so that we too go back to study God's Word ourselves. Whatever he exactly said it so enthralled them that they didn't want this Stranger to leave. They sit down for a meal together, the stranger takes some bread, gave thanks,

broke it and began to give it to them and then the disciples eyes are opened and they see: this is Jesus! Then he's gone again! But they aren't disappointed and sad. No, they are excited! **“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scripture to us?”** Through the Word Jesus restores their hope and they run back to the other followers of Jesus to share the Good News.

Jesus doesn't appear to us on the road as a Stranger. You know him. He's opened your eyes to see him. He comes to us on this road of life through His Word. And this Word has power; it does something. It opens our eyes to see Jesus on that shameful cross is his glory because it's there where he wins the right to be called your Savior and Lord. And because he lives, I have hope. I may not know what tomorrow will bring, but I know that because Jesus lives he's with me always. I don't know how everything is going to work out, but I do know that in Jesus somehow it will because he's already made me right with God. I do know that as long as we live in this world more hopes and dreams will be crushed and crash, but Jesus lives. My sins are forgiven. He wants me to be with him—so he insists we receive his body and blood to strengthen and forgive us. And we in turn, like Cleopas and his friend, want Jesus to remain with us as well. So, we pray at our own meals, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.” So, we pray, open our minds to understand his Word so we might see Jesus. So, we pray he encourages us and burns a desire in our hearts to get up and share this Good News. Invite him and bring her to be with you where Jesus always promises to be, here, in the Word, present in the Sacraments because Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Amen.