

+Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ!

It feels like Easter day was so long ago...but it has only been two weeks since we celebrated that day. I am sure that is due to our following the stay at home order and maintaining our social distance, making our time and days get a bit mixed together. At least working from home gives me a sense of what day of the week it is.

Easter day at our house was strangely different this year and I'm sure it was that way for most everyone. Where normally we would be dressed up and at church for a large portion of Easter morning, involved with worship services, coffee fellowship and egg hunts, this year had some of that but in the setting of our home. Leslie and I did get out some Easter decorations and had a colorful Easter table cloth. We sat in the kitchen on that morning, listening to Easter hymns on Spotify and eating blueberry coffee cake. But there was no time with our church family and no hiding Easter eggs or baskets for kids or grandkids, a tradition that we had kept going even as our children grew older.

In the two weeks following Easter day, life is still very different from the past. Most years I would have been supply preaching last week, the second Sunday of Easter, either at Our Savior or at another congregation, giving the pastor a well-deserved break after the marathon work of Holy Week and Easter. But no call for that this year. I volunteered for this week, thinking I could give Pastor Barnes a break but I know he put in time on letters to the congregation and worship planning for the weeks ahead.

I find during our current situation that sermon preparation helps me maintain a sense of the church year and life in general. Now, I might be the only one that remembers this but I had started this year challenging myself to preach on texts other than the Gospel readings but this week I could not pass up this familiar Easter story, 'the walk to Emmaus'. This text sounded so different than when we last heard it in the Easter season a few years ago. It brings definite Good news for us in these times as we face extreme struggles in our lives. I found an important message of **hope** for us all, as we live in a world with the major changes and restrictions, with so much sickness and death, with so much joblessness and loss of income, with all the additional stress for everyone just to live day to day. Hope is desperately needed especially in these times. So, let's turn to Luke's unique account, this story of the Walk to Emmaus.

Due to the length of the Gospel reading today, I did not record it, so I'm going to informally walk through the text with a bit of commentary added. This reading begins: '**Now on that same day**' which calls on us to remember that this story happened on that very first Easter day. Earlier that day, the women had gone to the tomb with the spices that they had prepared, only to find the tomb empty. Then suddenly two people in dazzling clothes tell them '**He is not here but has risen.**' The women return to tell the other disciples, who mostly thought their story was just idle talk except for Peter who runs to the tomb to see for himself.

So here on the same day we have two unknown followers/disciples leaving Jerusalem and walking to the village of Emmaus, 7 miles away or in Greek - 60 stadion (sta dion). While these two are walking, they talk about all that has happened in the last few days, and Jesus comes up heading their direction but they were kept from recognizing Him. Jesus asks them what were they discussing with to each other as they walked. Jesus' simple question stops them in their tracks. They are overcome with sadness. The one named Cleopas questions how anyone can ask that question when there is really only one topic of discussion on everyone's mind: all the things that had taken place in

Jerusalem the past few days. Jesus, staying simple, says *poios* (poy yos), a single Greek word for **what things?** The two followers then say ***'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.'*** Over the next five verses they recount the passion of Jesus, what had taken place over the last few days as well as stating that their hopes they had in Jesus have been destroyed by His death. ***'we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel'***.

I paused here to ponder these two followers' sense of hopelessness. They had seen their redemption taken away. We can image how long and hard that walk to the village of Emmaus would be for those two. Seven miles is a long walk when you are feeling in good spirits but burdened with sadness and despair, that walk would feel never-ending. There would be no light at the end of the tunnel because after they saw what happened to Jesus, that light had been extinguished by Jesus' crucifixion and death.

Pondering further made me realize that we, in our lives today, get the same sense of such a long, endless walk with extinguished hope, especially when we hear the daily counts of those tested positive with the coronavirus and the horrible numbers of people who have died from the disease. We feel the pain of loss and frustration when we cannot carry on living as we had been, not knowing when or how we might go back to a 'normal' life. In these times we can understand these two walking with a sense of abandonment, their hopes of what God was doing through Jesus had all been abruptly ended. Their hopes were lost.

Jesus' response to those two and to us is: ***'Oh, how foolish you are and slow of heart to believe'***. Foolish because of faith in a hope based on earthly parameters, the fulfillment of God's promise as envisioned only in human eyes, all hope focused on earthly power and might. In the foolish eyes of those two walking to Emmaus, all hopes in Jesus had been dashed, destroyed in His death.

But Jesus, as He walks with these two and as He walks with us, He opens the scripture in order that all understand and have Hope instead of being hopeless and lost. Through Jesus' crucifixion and death, He has opened a new way of life for us all. A life of forgiveness, an eternal life with God our Father, a life of hope, never-ending hope.

Jesus explains that His suffering and death fulfilled the scriptures. It did not extinguish any hope, it is the source of abundant hope. It is the fulfillment of God's promise. It is the source of our salvation.

Still these followers' eyes were not opened during the time that Jesus interpreted things about Himself in all the scriptures. It was not until they convinced Jesus to stay with them, to have a meal with them, and at that meal, it is when Jesus blesses the bread, breaks it and gives it to them to eat, that then their eyes opened. That is when they recognized that it had been Jesus with them all through that long walk. It was Jesus who instilled the Hope that they had thought been lost. The hope that those two followers had been desperately mourning prior to Jesus joining them. In that realization they remembered that their hearts were burning as Jesus opened the scriptures to them.

That Hope is still available and among us here today, especially now in what feels like our darkest times. Our hearts can also burn as we take time to open and ponder scripture, our eyes are opened as we turn away from our selfish misery, our fear, our worry. It is in the words of Holy Scripture that we find Hope for us all. And I say that to myself as much as anyone else, because I need to read and ponder scripture, feeling God's hope in these times. There is no better time than right now to read scripture in order to hear God's message for us and to feel the hope God provides

for us, the Love that God has given us to share. To know and be reassured of the salvation God has already provided for us.

All the commentaries that I read during my sermon prep had something to say about the fact that Jesus became 'known' to these two followers in the blessing, breaking and giving of the bread. Most commentaries pointed out the connection to the Last Supper in Luke's Gospel, chapter 22:19, but I found more help and hope in those commentaries that pointed out the similarities with Luke chapter 9:16: **Jesus feeding the 5000**. In all three places we hear that Jesus blessed the bread, broke it and gave to those to eat. The importance struck me connecting those words to the feeding of the 5000, especially in these times when school children, laid off workers, the homeless and so many more are struggling for food. This hope we receive from God through Jesus Christ is not just to bring us comfort but it is to move us to do God's work here in this world. Move us to action. This Hope and Love from God is for us to share with all, reaching out in this time of need for so many. And there are so many ways we can respond in sharing God's hope and love, by giving to the ELCA covid-19 response fund, by donating to local food banks, even by just buying a meal out at a local restaurant that has opened a curbside service. In all these and many more ways we share God's love and hope. This is not a time to be overwhelmed because as we turn to God, we find His direction for us in Jesus' action of blessing, breaking and giving the bread to all those in need. God's love is for us all and we are to live out that love for one another.

Let us pray:

**Loving God of all Hope, we turn to you so often but especially now in these sad and stressful times. We thank you for our families, our lives and all of your creation. Send your Holy Spirit upon us to guides us, to strengthen us, enlivening us to share your love and hope with all others. And we thank you God, for sending Your Son, Jesus the Christ, our Savior and our Lord. For this we are eternally grateful.
Amen.**

HYMN OF THE DAY – ELW #773 Precious Lord, Take My Hand
by Cameroon-based One Heart Gospel Acapella Group
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhn6keszrY8>