

5-4-2014 Luke 24:13-35 “Hope Beyond Disappointment”

Disappointment. We’ve all been there. Your first choice school turned you down, or the person you really thought you might marry didn’t work out... The dream job you were hired for turned out to be a nightmare... A test revealed all the wrong things... Your child died, or your spouse.... Hope was lost, and life looked dismal at best...

If you have experienced any such devastation, you can probably understand how the two men on the road felt that afternoon, walking from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus. Their road was a road of deep disappointment, of hope in the past tense. “We had hoped that this Jesus was the one to redeem Israel,” they explained (unknowingly) to the Risen Jesus as he walked with them. They had lost hope. Yes, there had been rumors of resurrection, but the only thing these two men knew was the reality of death. They had seen the crucifixion. There had been a body. They knew death when they saw it. Hope was gone.

The Emmaus Road can represent the road of disappointment, when there seems to be no hope. As I think of so many situations in our world right now, the terrible landslide in Afghanistan, almost daily bombings in the Middle East and Africa, the tensions over Ukraine, the sunken ferry off of South Korea, even our own country’s political standoffs, they seem not all that different from this devastating, apparently hopeless road. Perhaps the struggle of some of our folks with cancer also seems like a hopeless, uphill road... Perhaps a broken marriage... perhaps a messy relationship with one’s child, or neighbor.... In some way, most of us have walked such roads; perhaps we do so today.

The two men on the Road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus when he joined them on their journey. Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor heard two children talking about blindness. One of them asked, “How do you know when you are blind?” The other one answered, “You don’t. You only know afterwards, when you can see.” ... Until we have recognized Jesus in our midst will we do not know what we have missed seeing before. (*Gospel Medicine*, p. 22)

Here’s a story:

Ellen was a graduate of a NYC law school with more than her share of educational loans to repay. Her best option, she figured, was to take a job working for the city doing legal aid work. The pay was low, but the deal was that if she stayed for 3 years or more her loan payments would be made for her during that time. “It was a purely economic decision, she said, I did not think that I could get a high-paying job at the time because the market was so tight.”

Her economic decision turned out to be a difficult one. She found herself defending people who were poor, who were ignorant of the law, who were not in the habit of keeping appointments or following through on commitments. She had a huge case load in a chaotic court system.

After six months she was ready to quit. It seemed to be a dead end job that accomplished little or nothing for people who were unable to show any appreciation for her efforts on their behalf. Then one night she had a dream.

In the dream there was a whole line of indigent clients waiting to see her. She felt totally overwhelmed. But when she looked up at the first client she saw the face of Christ looking back at her. Then with the second client she saw the same thing. She wasn't sure how she knew it was Christ, because they all looked different—different races, old, young, men women—but they all had the unmistakable face of Christ—and she wanted to help them all.

Ellen said that she awoke from that dream feeling such peace and serenity that it carried her through her work for the next 2 ½ years. The work was just as hopeless as ever, and the conditions got no better, but she wrote, “My attitude changed in such a way that I was able to be a caring person, and at the end of each day I was tired but content; frustrated but not discouraged; hurried but peaceful. And even though I later moved on to a different, more profitable, type of work I have never been more fulfilled in my work than I was at that job.”
(Told by W. Eddins)

So here we are. Two weeks have passed since Easter... The world presses in on us. We're stressed, afraid, tired, maybe old, perhaps ill, probably unsure of what lies ahead. We read and hear bad news in papers and on television. When we bury our loved ones we do not find empty tombs... We pray over folks who are ill and often watch them continue to physically decline... The road of our lives very often seem as full of discouragement as that dusty Emmaus road did for those two men...

But wait: we have been given this story...The Emmaus story is the story of a God who will not leave us alone, even when we cannot believe, even when we are hurt and disappointed, even when we cannot recognize Jesus in anything around us, when it seems that the brightest and best in life is over.

One more thing we should notice about this story of those who finally recognized that Jesus was with them: they immediately went to share the news with others. For the two men from Emmaus, this meant doing a 180 (turning around) in the middle of the night (no street lights) to walk a seven-mile journey back to Jerusalem to tell others that they had seen Jesus alive. For us, the journey may have a different shape, but the message should end up being the same.

We are walking along the roads of the lives we have been given. It is quite likely that God would like for us to “retune” our vision, so that we can notice and understand where God would like for us to share hope, forgiveness and help in the places around us. We don't have to be afraid to see new needs or hurts, because no matter what challenges, disappointments, or opportunities we encounter, the Risen Christ is with us.

By the grace and power of the Living God, may we come to see that Jesus is risen and alive, right in our midst! By the grace and power of God, may each of us recognize in Jesus hope and challenge beyond every disappointment. Amen.