

“We Had Hoped”

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Script: Luke 24:13-35

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The phenomenon of e-mail forwards has made my job all the tougher. The usual jokes and short stories I heard years ago I could use as sermon material, but now those things are sent at lightning-speed to millions of people, rendering a good joke I heard on Thursday un-usable by Sunday because everyone’s heard it, along with the command to forward it along to five friends or else the joke will lose its funniness and somebody will, as a result, enter into dark despair and consider being an atheist. That said, and knowing that many of you have heard this story before, I use this story anyway.

There was once a group of monks in a remote monastery who had rare ancient copy of the Bible in the original Greek. They saw it only occasionally (maybe like the Ark of the Covenant in ancient Israel), with only a select chosen few able to actually see it with their own eyes. It was so valuable they could not risk its safety by having it out and accessible. They also wanted to show reverence by not taking it for granted (like some think of communion). A Biblical scholar traveled to the monastery to study this ancient text, requested some time with it and was refused. The usual rules were given. Then, after some deliberation, a monk was chosen to go in and view it, to see if the scholar could perhaps be allowed a short time with it. He went into the room, was silent for a long time. A crowd grew outside the door waiting to see him when he returned. Then after a long silence, they heard gentle weeping from the inner cell through the doors. They don’t dare go in... they waited in complete silence. Eventually he emerged from the room and said, “**The word is *celebrate*, not *celibate*!**”

Disappointment: There comes moments in our lives when we realize that perhaps we’d gotten it all wrong; maybe what we thought was all-important isn’t, and we’d wasted much of our lives pursuing the wrong thing.

There comes a time in our lives when we see that our lives or the world didn’t turn out the way we’d planned or hoped, and that much of life isn’t fair or just. There comes a time when we realize that life could have been different,

- had we just listened a little better,
- been a little more open,

- took a few more risks,
- shared a little more,
- gotten the help we needed earlier.

Life could have been different, had we read a little closer & seen the difference between *celibate* and *celebrate*.

If you know what I mean with all these words, you know what it was like to walk along that dusty road outside of Jerusalem on that Easter afternoon with Cleopas and the other, un-named disciple: disappointment, confusion, sadness.

Disappointment... the feeling that they'd placed their trust and all their chips in the wrong place. "We had hoped..." they said, "that he was the one to redeem Israel."

- We all know the disappointment of a politician who is also human,
- a lover whom we've placed divine expectations upon,
- a church that we expect to be perfect, yet stand for and do everything *we* want it to.

Cleopas and his friend experienced **confusion...** "some are telling us wild tales we cannot believe" Cleopas said of the rumors of Jesus' resurrection.

The sadness & pain is revealed in the silence after Jesus asks them "What things?" The text puts it so powerfully, "They stood still, looking sad." This sadness drives them to "get out of town." They couldn't take it anymore.

When faced with this kind of sadness we all want to get out of town... to go to our own Emmaus', be they a cabin, a bar, a bottle, a movie, or buying a new car, a suit, reading a second-rate novel¹, or going to church and crawling into a few comfortable hymns. We can all understand their desire to get out of town.

We can understand their **confusion** because we share the doubting & despairing of Thomas...asked to believe unbelievable things.

We can understand their **disappointment**, realizing that if Jesus was the one to redeem Israel, it was a totally different kind of redeeming than they'd expected and wanted... as different as *celibate* from *celebrate*.

And so when Jesus walked with them along that road to Emmaus he was breaking more than just the Word of God open. And at table, he was breaking more than

¹FREDERICK BUECHNER, *THE MAGNIFICENT DEFEAT*, P. 85

just bread, even more than just himself... he was holding their own brokenness, confusion and pain... their own doubting & disbelieving and misplaced expectations.

>There are times when I feel like Cleopas and his friend, whoever he or she was.

>There are times when I don't have any idea what to share with you on Sunday mornings and the thought of doing it scares me witless.

>There are times when my own misunderstanding, disappointment, confusion and sadness are great and I fear I totally miss the presence of God walking along side me. I fear my life could be different if I could see God's presence now.

>It is my brokenness that Jesus holds in his hands.

I am only able to sleep at night, and stand before you this morning because of the thought that I don't have to have it all together. Cleopas and his friend didn't. In fact, in my brokenness there is an openness that makes room for the risen Christ. Maybe that is the core of it this morning. The Good News is that we are broken and it is precisely our brokenness which makes it possible for something of God to be with us. These cracks in our pride and heart, leading to humility & love are the things God uses to get to us.

The brokenness of that couple who walked with Jesus made them receptive to hearing God's word. God is a God of 2nd chances, who comes to us again and again. It is not up to me to have it all together, have it all figured out, to be perfect, because God comes to us again and again in Scripture, in the Sacraments, in sharing a meal with strangers & friends, along the dusty roads of our attempts to escape. "When two or three are gathered together, I am in your midst" is the promise.

Second chances: For Thomas... for Peter...for the disciples... and Cleopas' friend who is nameless because it is one of those places in the Bible where we're suppose to write our own names in_____.

Our job is not to get it, figure it out and solidify it...hold onto it, package and lock it in so it doesn't escape— but simply to take it in (Bread, Word, Presence). Our job is not to have it all together, always, without disbelief/confusion, but to take in... to take into ourselves again and again the 2nd chances and the Word of God along the road of our lives and in shared meals. Kathleen Norris reminds us that the Latin words "we believe" (as in the opening words of our creeds) is not about figuring it out or understanding some theology, but it is a heart-thing. To "believe" means literally "I give my heart to." It has the flavor of a marriage vow. We don't

have to understand someone else to give our hearts to them, and the same is true with Christ.

The Good News is that in our brokenness, our lives are held, and the presence of Christ invades continually, bringing new life. Christ comes and walks along side us in our times. Cleopas and his friend saw that Christ does redeem, but in a wholly different and much more wondrous, eternal, and life-giving way.

Easter did not end at sundown on that Sunday. Easter stretches into the rest of our lives...into the rest of time & creation. The rest of our lives are an extension of the Easter reality. Christ comes to us continually with healing in his wings (even if we cannot recognize him). Christ is present in our own brokenness, sending us back to Jerusalem... back into life. Thanks be to God. Amen.