

Broken Hearts & Burning Hearts

Luke 24:13-32: Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?"

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, and who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took

bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

When I was a young girl, about Mechayla's age, my favorite television show was "Gunsmoke." For younger people who don't know about "Gunsmoke," let me tell you about it. It was a TV show set in Dodge City, Kansas, back in the time when there were no cell phones and no computers. There were not even cars or paved roads. It was back in the "Wild West" and women wore long skirts and had to work hard in the fields and in their homes to make meals. Dodge City had a blacksmith and one general store for supplies and, of course, a saloon where the men hung out. Most of the people were good, hardworking people, but often bad guys would ride into town on horses with guns to seek to steal and cause trouble. Marshall Matt Dillon was in charge of keeping the peace. To be honest, he was my first crush. He was tall, handsome and safe. He knew how to scare the bad guys. Often, when the bad guys were caught or if there was some trouble afoot, they would have to get out of Dodge quickly.

There is a saying, "Get out of Dodge," which may have come from the likes of "Gunsmoke" days. It refers to needing to get out of a place quickly because of trouble or pain or loss. Kind of like a "getaway." Sometimes it was the good guys who had to "get out of Dodge" because they were afraid the bad guys would get them.

Well, in our story from Luke's gospel today, the two people on the road to Emmaus aren't trying to get out of Dodge, but they surely are trying to get out of Jerusalem. They had most likely gone to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover—usually a time of joy and remembrance of how God delivered God's people from the bad guys back when Israel was under the thumb of the Egyptian pharaoh. It was a time of rituals, prayer, fellowship and good food. But then all the stuff with Jesus happened. The trial, the beatings, the angry crowds, the dissension, the

crucifixion. A time of holy joy had turned into a nightmare. One of the things that made this nightmare worse was that the bad guys of their time—the Romans—weren't the only people behind this. The Jewish people's own temple leaders helped to crucify Jesus. Not even the temple was safe anymore! Sometimes when there is unrest in a place—like when there are riots in a city like ours, or other unrest—the best thing to do is stay away. Leave town. Get out of Dodge. Get out of Jerusalem.

And this is what these two people on the road to Emmaus were doing.

All Those “We Had Hoped” Moments

There is a line in the text that tells us that these two people were in Jerusalem for more than just the Passover. They had been followers of this Jesus. Look at verse 21: “**We had hoped** that he was the one to redeem Israel.” *They had hoped* he would be the Matt Dillon on a white horse to save them from the oppressive Romans. *They had hoped* he would bring back the glory days of Israel.

They had hoped. But no longer.

They had hoped. But now it was over. They were living in a Good Friday world.

Can you think of a time when you have thought, “we had hoped” ...?

Our child was so full of promise and intelligence. *We had hoped* he or she would make it through college, but the people of the streets got into him or her in some way.

Cancer runs in our family, but *we had hoped* our loved one would not be among those who got this awful disease. We had hoped.

We elected a new leader to our city or state. *We had hoped* this person would make things

better, but the politics were so messy that the leader couldn't find her way through.

We had hoped our marriage would be forever.

We had hoped that the new pastor would cause an instant turnaround in the church.

We had hoped that the new job would make us happy and fix our financial problems.

We had hoped that the drug treatment program would help set our loved one free.

We had hoped that all the efforts we made to help people would make a difference.

We had hoped that if we loved that person enough, they would love us back.

We had hoped that if we prayed hard enough, the racism in that person's heart would weaken.

We had hoped ...

We had hoped ...

Most of us in this life know the broken heart that goes along with the line "*we had hoped.*"

Our Cleopas and friend on the road "had hoped," and their hopes were dashed. The best thing they knew to do was to get out of Dodge. Get out of Jerusalem.

Dashed hopes and broken hearts have a way of making life gray for a while. When Good Friday is looming in our hearts, it's like a cloud is over our vision and we can't see anything or believe anything but the grief. Have you ever been going through a "dashed hopes and broken heart" time in your life and have a friend say something like, "Aren't the lilacs fabulous this spring?"

They smell so good and look so vibrant?" You want to tell them to just shut up. Your heart is broken and your hopes are dashed, and you didn't even notice those darned lilacs or even care. It is enough to make it through the day with a broken heart. Who has time for lilacs?

When we have dashed hopes and broken hearts, it is harder to see the things of life around us.

Jesus Keeps Breaking In

So these two people didn't really even realize who showed up with them on the road.

We know what the two people didn't know. We know because Luke tells us that it was Jesus. Here he is again. Coming to people in their pain. Showing up. Walking alongside them on some ordinary road as they are seeking to get out of Dodge.

Have you noticed how Jesus keeps doing this? Shows up to Mary crying in the garden; shows up in rooms where the doors are locked because of fears and confusion; makes a special effort to show up to Doubting Thomas. Jesus keeps going to people and showing up.

And when he asks these travelers to Emmaus what they are talking about, they are amazed that someone wouldn't know what had happened to their Jesus. They stood still, the text tells us, kind of stunned maybe. And they tell him about what happened.

And then this stranger begins to open up the scriptures to them, tells them about how this Jesus had to suffer and die to fulfill the promises of God. The text doesn't come right out and say it, but you get the sense of the trip going quickly. Seven miles doesn't feel like seven miles when you have someone sharing a fabulous story and teaching so profoundly.

And even as Jesus is teaching them and sharing the story of God's love from the time of Moses to what they are experiencing this day on the road to Emmaus, they still don't see him. They still don't recognize him.

When they get to Emmaus, they invite him in for dinner. And it is in the ordinary breaking of bread and eating together that they see who he is.

This part is cool, isn't it? In this story it isn't in a life-changing worship service, or even during his seven-mile sermon that they recognize him. It isn't in some miraculous healing or some high-intensity occasion that they recognize him. It is in the middle of a simple meal among friends. Bread broken, taken, eaten.

And as they recognize him, he disappears. They see him, but they can't cling to him.

And then they say, "Didn't our hearts burn?" Their broken hearts burned on the road. They didn't know what was going on, but as they looked back they realized that something was happening inside them as he was talking, though they couldn't recognize it at the time.

Backwards and Forwards in Life

Soren Kierkegaard, a 19th-century theologian and philosopher, wrote that life is usually only understood backward, though we must live it forward.

That seems to be what is happening here. The two travelers look back and are beginning to understand as they reflect and ponder.

And this is our hope, too, isn't it, my friends? We have lived long enough to know that somewhere down the road the "we had only hoped" moments of our lives may make some sense.

How many of us had had brokenhearted "we had only hoped" moments in our lives and now look back and realize that God sent angels, usually in the form of human beings, that made hope and love burn in our hearts again—though we maybe didn't recognize them at the time.

Someone I know—I'll call him, Harry—made some mistakes and ended up spending almost two years in prison. Harry was a smart man, top student, loved by his family and church, and the community was devastated when charges were brought and he had to do time. Harry spent the first six months in prison hardly being able to move, he told me. This “we had only hoped” moment in his life was more than he could bear, and he even thought about taking his life.

One of the deputies/guards greeted him by name each day. Often, they would only say his name when they had to call him to go see the warden or if his lawyer came to visit. “HARRY!” they would bark out. But this deputy didn't grunt or bark at him or even order him around. She called him by his name. “Time to get up, Harry.”

“Harry, don't you want more on your food tray?”

“Harry, do you want to see the chaplain.”

Whenever this guard greeted Harry, it was by name.

Harry didn't think much about Jesus before going into prison, though his mother made him go to church every Sunday. And he remembered, in that prison cell, the story of Jesus calling Mary by name on Easter morning. And he told me that after a while, every time the guard said, “Harry,” he wondered if Jesus might be calling his name. He didn't use this language, but something burned inside him every time she called his name and reminded him that he was a person and he was and is loved.

He made it through the two years—getting out early because it was his first time—and as far as I know his only time in prison.

He looks back and realizes that the voice of Jesus came to him through that guard. It took him a while to recognize it.

Most of us have not done prison time, we have not witnessed our dearest friend crucified on a cross, but we know those “we only hoped” moments, don’t we?

God & Jesus Are Here

As Easter people, we cling to the hope that Jesus does show up in the “we only hoped” moments of life. We also recognize that often we don’t see him. We don’t know or realize he is there. Indeed, he is here right now. Most often we, like the writer of that “Footprints” poem, look back and realized that God was carrying us and was with us, though we didn’t realize it at the time.

And sometimes we are given the grace to be aware of our hearts burning. We come into worship on a week when we had another shooting in our beloved city, when tensions between our country and North Korea seem to be mounting, when poverty, racism and pain still permeate our culture and our lives. But yet, as we are here, aren’t our hearts burning? As we remember our baptisms, as we take communion together, as we hear God’s word preached one more time, as we hug our children, or ponder how God has been with us and present with us even when we were not aware of it—aren’t our hearts burning?

And if our hearts aren’t burning, we remind ourselves that he is here. Part of being Easter people is that we remind ourselves over and over again that because of the resurrection, love wins and we can have hope. We remind ourselves that God does always show up—right on time. There is some discipline involved in this. Because the Good Friday realities—the “we had only hoped” places in this world—are looming and overwhelming sometimes that we, too, are tempted to think they have won.

But, my brothers and sisters, we are an Easter people. Let us choose to remind ourselves and each other on this new day that our Jesus does promise to show up. He moved into the neighborhood. We may not see him always. We may wonder if he is there. But let us remind ourselves and each other on this Sunday that he is here. He promised he would be. Let us hold

our broken hearts and our burning hearts before him. Those in the world might think we are like the women who saw Jesus alive. Crazy. But we know that love will win.

On days when we doubt. On days when the Good Fridays seem more than we can bear. On days when the “we had only hoped” moments cloud our vision and our wisdom, let us ask for Easter eyes to see him in the ordinary places of our lives: in meals with each other, in our youth who served us spaghetti last night, in the adults who helped them behind the scenes, in the car, at the supermarket, at school, and more. Let us remind each other and encourage each other that love will win. Jesus is risen indeed and he is Lord.

And it is up to us, my friends, to keep holding onto hope. To keep working and loving. To keep following our resurrected Lord into the streets and hospitals. Into the places in our lives when sin wants to win. Into all the world!

The Good News!

So, let’s remind ourselves and listen for that burning in our hearts. Repeat after me our Easter Hope:

This is the Good News! The cross is empty.

This is the Good News! Once we were not a people; now we are God’s people!

This is the Good News! The Word of God is near to us!

This is the Good News! We are nourished by the love of God!

This is the Good News! The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot comprehend it.

No matter what “we had only hoped” places in our lives we are holding this day, may we let all this burn in our broken hearts as well.

Amen!