

The gospel lesson we are about to read is one that is read a lot within a couple of weeks after Easter. It is a story that is only found in the gospel of Luke and not in the other 3 gospels. This is a story which Luke tells immediately after he tells the story of the women finding the empty tomb.

This is a rich story because of its simplicity and because of its power. Many people in reading this story believe it is a story which describes the entire Christian journey. That it is one small story included in order to tell a much bigger story.

You will notice that this story is set as a journey away from Jerusalem out into the region of Galilee. That is basically the opposite path of Jesus' earthly life. For Jesus journeys from ministry in the region of Galilee toward his final days in the city of Jerusalem. So this story is a story of going back to where Jesus has come from but with a new set of experiences.

Read Luke 24:13-35

Peggy. Peggy was the teenage girl in the church youth group that I bought the heart shaped necklace for with the tiny diamond in the middle. Peggy was the girl that when it was time to sit down together for Sunday School I always made it a point to sit beside her.

Peggy went to a different high school than I did so when she invited me to her house on Sunday nights to hang out with her two sisters and her parents I always accepted the invitation. Peggy was the one that I invited out to the Japanese restaurant for a date on a Saturday night. Peggy was the one that I wanted to date.

But then Peggy shared those crushing words that every guy who is pursuing a girl hates to hear. "You know Sam, you are just like a brother to me." No, I really don't want to be your brother. That's not what I had in mind. I had hoped that we could be something else. I had hoped for something different.

How many times have we said the words, "I had hoped." Maybe we have said phrases like, "I started a business and I had hoped that it would be successful." "I graduated from college and I had hoped to have a nice job offer." "I had hoped that a certain guy would have asked me out by now."

"I had hoped when I reached 55 I could retire early." "I had hoped to be able to stay in my old house but then circumstances forced me to make a move." "I had hoped to have children by now."

"I had hoped that my parents would have been able to stay together and not get divorced." "I had hoped.." are words which all of us have said at one time or another.

In this scripture which we have read this is a phrase which makes a central appearance. Two men are walking along on a road heading toward the village of Emmaus. We do not know where Emmaus is. We are only told that it is 60 stadia or 7 miles from Jerusalem. These men are talking about what all has happened.

I find it surprising that we are told that this journey begins on the same day that the women have found an empty tomb. Word does not usually travel all that fast in the biblical world compared to our world. But the news of the empty tomb has reached the ears on these men on the day that it happened.

And like we hear so often in the scriptures the women who encountered the risen Christ are not believed by the men. These two men are walking along and then a third man joins them. They do not recognize him and they do not ask for his name. This stranger then asks the two men what they are discussing.

We are told that the men appear sad. One of them, the one named Cleopas, then answers with a question. "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who has not heard about what has taken place? The things about Jesus who was a prophet mighty in word and deed? How the chief priests handed him over to be condemned to death?"

“We had hoped...” We had hoped that he would save Israel. We had hoped.

I had hoped. We had hoped. These are the words which are only said by us with an air of sadness. We had hoped to get that job. We had hoped to be drafted in the 1st round. We had hoped for a relationship to last. We had hoped.

It is a difficult place to be when we come to the place of recognition that our hopes have not come to pass. And that is what happens to these two men in our story today. Their hopes have been dashed.

But the unrealized hopes are not the end of this story. These men then tell the astonishing news. The astonishing news that the women are claiming that the tomb is empty. The astonishing news that others went to the tomb and verified that it was empty.

It is at this point in this story that Jesus speaks again even while the other two men still do not recognize him. Jesus reminds them of what the prophets had shared. Jesus reminds the two men that the prophets like Moses and the others had told the people that the Messiah would suffer these things but then enter into his glory.

The three men then begin to enter into the village of Emmaus and Jesus appears ready to leave them all alone. But then the men reach out to Jesus and urge him to stay with them. Jesus accepts their invitation and joins them for a meal that night.

While reclining at the table together, Jesus takes bread and breaks it and shares it with the two men. As they accept his offer they suddenly recognize that it is the risen Christ in their midst.

“How could we have missed this?” they say to one another. Jesus then vanishes from their sight. The two men then eagerly share with others that they too have now encountered the risen Christ.

As these two men express their sadness at dashed hopes Jesus appears among them. In the midst of their sadness over dashed hopes they do not recognize that Jesus is with them.

Maybe we too are in that place in our life when we are coming to terms with dashed hopes. Maybe we have come in saying, "I had hoped" about something in our life. And maybe this story teaches us that in those moments of dashed hopes that Jesus is there but that we may not be seeing him. Maybe he is giving us guidance even though we are not aware that this guidance is coming from him.

But when do these men recognize the Christ who has been in their midst? They discover him as they share hospitality with this stranger. So maybe if we find ourselves facing disappointment in our life we can respond by showing hospitality ourselves.

Maybe when we show hospitality and welcome to the stranger we may see and hear what Christ is saying to us. If we look inwardly maybe we miss where Christ is. But if we look outwardly and show hospitality maybe we will discover where Christ is in our midst.

"I had hoped" can be crushing words indeed. Well, it's been some 35 years since I was told that Peggy felt like I was a brother to her. Peggy and I are still friends. Her younger sister actually lives in York now. What seemed like crushing words at the time are not that way anymore. I laugh with Peggy about her words now.

"I had hoped" may be a place where you are right now. But you are not the only one to ever be in that place. You are, however, invited to show hospitality to the stranger.

Maybe as you show hospitality to the stranger you will see where God is and what God is doing. AMEN.

+++++

-Given: April 30, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)