

*On the road with Jesus.* A sermon preached on April 17, 2016, at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church Prince George, by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: HEBREWS 4:14-16  
LUKE 24:13-35

Have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words in the English language begin with the letter 'D'

For example, disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, despair and death.

Any and all of these words describe the setting of this morning's reading from Luke. Cleopas and his companion are walking toward Emmaus.

They are followers of Jesus.

Their last memory is the events of Good Friday

Their teacher, the Master has been executed – cruelly and shamefully by crucifixion

An execution that is slow, painful and very public.

Only a week before on Palm Sunday, the disciples' hopes had risen to fever pitch with the Alleluias and waving palms.

Not perhaps the most majestic of entries into Jerusalem – Jesus riding on a donkey  
Nevertheless,

There is tremendous excitement and hope

The longed for deliverer from Roman occupation  
has arrived.

Free at last, free at last...

But now, the deliverer, their leader, and teacher  
lies dead in a sealed tomb

Their dreams gone

Their hopes dashed!

The little band of Jesus' followers now  
has no leader and the group is drifting apart

News of Judas' suicide is confirmed

Thomas is nowhere to be found

The reports of Jesus' body not in the tomb seems  
like just more bad news

So, like two wounded animals shirking off to die,  
Cleopas and his companion head toward

Emmaus – a day's walk from Jerusalem.

They know they will face the jeers of the  
townspeople in Emmaus – "look here come the  
followers of the big dream

Told you he was just a reactionary – cleverer than  
most, but still just a reactionary!

What a mess!

The mood, attitude, body language of the two  
walking so well summarized by Luke in verse 21

**...and we had hoped that he [Jesus] was the one  
to redeem Israel.**

**We had hoped.**

The on the road two had walled hopelessness around themselves.

They were self-absorbed in their own misery. Essentially, they were convincing themselves with each step – “we do not expect it now – this thing called hope.

We once thought we had it, but NOW – it’s gone!

Of the 4 post resurrection stories recorded in any detail in the gospels – the walk to Emmaus has long been my favourite.

It is not a ‘better’ story than the others, for each of the 4 has poignancy and power does it not?

Each tells a story of Jesus’ reconciliation and forgiveness of those who had been so close to him, but abandoned him,

Even denied him at the critical moment.

Here in Luke,

Two followers of Jesus, consumed in their grief,  
Low on hope,

Saying little, yet, not abandoned by God

It takes time for them to see this,

To realize this,

They do not ‘see’ Jesus immediately do they?

It is *only as they look back*

*As something – in their case – the breaking of bread – triggers their memories,*

That they are able to see, to know that the Risen Christ was with them on the walk and is with them now!

It is that element of seeing Jesus *as we look back* that is for me so evocative and hopeful. For how often God does not make his presence know at the moment, but as we think back, Look back in our lives; it is clear that he is with us,  
As much as he is with the disciples on the Emmaus Road and beyond.

The late Peter Marshall, one time Chaplain of the United States Senate so clearly phrased this sense of in looking back we know God is with us in a prayer Marshall titled, 'The Grateful Heart' It is a prayer that speaks profoundly even yet. Permit me to pray it now.

Lord, I pause to look back on the long way Thou hast brought me, on the long days in which I have been served, not according to my deserts, but according to my desires and Thy loving mercies. Let me meditate on the dark nights through which I have come, the sinister things from which I have been delivered—and have a grateful heart. Let me mediate upon my sins forgiven, for my shame unpublished and have a grateful heart. I thank thee O Lord that in Thy mercy, so many things I feared never came to pass. Fill my heart with thankful praise. Help me to repay in service to others the debt of Thy unmerited benefits and mercies.

(Prayers of Peter Marshall, p. 29, 1954, McGraw-Hill, New York)

Owing to the truth that for so many hope is a very fragile thing – when it withers, it is so hard to revive.

And owing to the fact that a sense of hopelessness seems so strong in so many areas of our lives,

The Emmaus walk story is a story that allows us to be both honest and encouraged about ourselves and about God.

How so?

The story clearly confronts us with the truth *that there are seasons and times in our life that can create a sense of real hopelessness and despair,*

Being a faithful follower of Jesus will not magically transport us to a place where hopelessness and despair are absent.

And when we experience such things, it is NOT a signal that we have abandoned by God.

We may have drawn away from God, but he never draws away from us!

The Emmaus two were bewildered, confused, in despair, concerned about what was ahead – all for good and sufficient (in their view) reasons.

Remember, we know the rest of the story  
 At the point, where they begin their walk to Emmaus and when Jesus comes alongside them – they do not know the whole story.

I believe there are Emmaus walk times in our lives.

Times when we know all too well the feelings and moods the Emmaus two exhibited.

For example, when we see someone we love and care for overtaken by illness, which goes on and on.

After a while, despair may set in.

It may become impossible to pray, even hope for recovery.

For if we hope, will we be able to cope with another let down.

That is certainly an Emmaus walk time!

When a job or work you enjoy doing disappears owing to buy outs, take overs, downsizing, how often hope takes a big dip.

Why me? Why now? How can I manage? Where do I go from here?

Like the Emmaus 2 you replay over and over again what has happened.

When a child's behavior, misbehavior or poor choices make a parent wonder, where did we go wrong?

We thought what we did was for their good

We tried so hard to help, but not what

Where do we go from here?

That truly can be and often is an Emmaus walk time.

Add to this, events in the world around us – immediate and global – so many things seem capricious and random – this too can erode this fragile thing called hope

However, all is not lost!

Certainly there are things in our lives,  
Times and seasons that erode our hope – that's reality!

*But it is not the whole story is it?*

*It's not the long view or wider perspective.*

I certainly do not want to cavalierly dismiss the reality of times where hope is at low ebb

How Long, O Lord.

Yet the Emmaus experience in particular and the Christian faith in general rests on a truth – GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US.

That we may not always and immediately see that this is so has nothing to do with optics, \ But with perception and conviction – i.e. our faith in the Risen Christ.

So yet another strong reminder from the Emmaus walk is that *the presence of the Risen Christ always 'walks' with us.*

Life has so many distractions doesn't it?

Hard work, routine, tiredness, compassion fatigue, caring for others, ill health – each can so grind us down that we carry on mechanically,

Never lifting our eyes – or minds from the dust of the earthly road we travel – to pick up on the Emmaus imagery.

We become unaware of the glory and strength of God's presence with us

We stop looking for the sense of wonder and awe all around us

Life loses its meaning and leaves us washed out sometimes – yes?

Well, here's the real good news.

*Jesus never gives up on us,*

*He never abandons us for someone more faithful, more important or flashier.*

There is no depth of despair to which we may sink from which HE will walk away.

Discouragement, anger, frustration, fist shaking, grief, self-absorption, will not make Jesus cast us aside

The final hymn we will sing this morning has never been one of my top 10 favorites. It is growing on me though!

But I have never disputed Joseph Scrivens' words and phrases in 'What a Friend we have in Jesus'

For these words and phrases are anchored in the truths of scripture

NOTHING in our lives is beyond the care and involvement of God

Nothing is too unimportant to God.

God wants to help,

To love,  
 To care,  
 To forgive,  
 To comfort.

His action through Jesus with the Emmaus 2 is but one very clear example that this is the case.

Not only does the Risen Christ walk alongside the Emmaus 2 – a powerful symbol and image in and of itself

*The Risen Christ also intentionally and purposefully engages with the Emmaus 2 doesn't he?*

Jesus is not passive Saviour, but an active Redeemer.

He begins by listening,

By open-ended questions which encourage the Emmaus 2 to bear their souls as it were.

Not interrupting or speaking platitudes and empty holy words.

Just listening!

Then at the right time – *Kairos*, (God's time) not *chronos* time (our 24 hours a day time)

The risen Christ gives the Emmaus 2 the greatest Old Testament exposition in history.

I wonder why Luke does not record what Jesus said on this occasion.

Perhaps he knows already how easy it is to turn Jesus' words into codified and ossified rules.

In the end,

It is not the story in and of itself that open the eyes of the Emmaus two to the reality, nearness and presence of the Risen Christ.

It is the story, plus action – breaking of bread that triggers their awareness that Jesus is alive,  
The dream is not dead, their hope is rekindled.

In our Emmaus Road times, the presence of the Risen Christ is just as intentional and observable as He was to the Emmaus 2

This may well not take the exact form of **interpreting the things about himself in all the scriptures**

But happen it will, if we are prepared to:

Be honest before God

Wait with purpose

Trust in God

Not one of those things are or will be easy, for this is not a listening, waiting, being patient world in which we live

Rather it is world, too conditioned to instant result and uncomfortable with mystery

It's great and hopeful story isn't it?

For Jesus is alive –

The presence of the Risen Christ is truly with us – listening, hearing, and then intentionally and purposefully responding to make each of us be the people he so wants us to be.