

April 18 & 19, 2026 – Easter 3

Luke 24:13-35

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

Ms. Jones was a teacher who was working in the children's hospital. One day, she was asked to visit a boy named Charlie who was in a burn unit. Charlie's school teacher told her, "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now. I'd be grateful if you could help him with his homework, so he doesn't fall too far behind."

Ms. Jones went to Charlie's room in the hospital. He was wrapped in bandages and in incredible pain. As gently as she could, Ms. Jones introduced herself and the purpose of her visit this way: "I'm the hospital teacher. Your teacher at school asked me to help you with your nouns and adverbs."

The next day a nurse asked Ms. Jones, "What did you do to Charlie?" Ms. Jones had no idea what she was talking about. The nurse said, "We were worried about Charlie. But ever since you visited him yesterday, his entire outlook has changed. For the first time since he came here, he's fighting. He's got a new lease on life."

What had happened? Charlie eventually admitted to his parents that he had given up. He felt hopeless and helpless. But when he thought about the teacher who had come to see him, he realized the school wouldn't waste its time and money by sending someone to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy. Pretty perceptive, don't you think?

Two disciples were walking down the dusty road to the village of Emmaus, a 7-mile journey from Jerusalem. Their talk concerned the crucified Jesus. Their attitude was like they had just come from a funeral. And they had, in a way, Jesus' funeral. They walked as if they'd lost all hope.

The disciples had staked their lives on this Jesus from Nazareth. Everything they had. They thought he was the One. A prophet powerful in word and deed. He done so many miracles. He even raised the dead. They hoped he was the Messiah, the promised One who would redeem Israel. And then, in one weekend, their hopes and their world came crashing down around them. Jesus was dead, buried, and now nowhere to be seen. The rumor by the women of a resurrection didn't provide any comfort. It all seemed so hopeless.

These two disciples were hoping for a golden throne. Jesus gave them a bloody cross. They were hoping for honor. Jesus bowed his thorn-crowned head in humility. They were hoping for glorious triumph. Jesus gave them a dark tomb. They were hoping for the answers to all their prayers. But they were praying for the wrong results. They were praying for their kingdom to come, but Jesus suffered, died, and was laid in the grave so his Kingdom would come. How foolish they were, and how slow of heart to believe.

Their walk was slow, but their questions came quickly. "How could Judas do that?" "Why wasn't Peter stronger?" "Why did the high priest hate Jesus so much?" "What do we do now?" Just then a stranger came up from behind and said, "I'm sorry, but I couldn't help overhearing you. Who are you discussing?" They stopped and turned. Cleopas asked, "Where have you been the last few days? Haven't you heard about Jesus of Nazareth?" And he continued to tell what happened.

This is a fascinating scene with two sincere disciples telling how the last nail was driven into Israel's coffin. God, in disguise, listens patiently, his wounded hands buried deeply in his robe. He must have been touched by the faithfulness of this pair of disciples. Yet he must also have been a bit hurt. He had just gone to hell and back to give heaven to earth, and these two were worried about the political situation in Israel.

"But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." But we had hoped. How often have you heard a phrase like that? "I was hoping I'd feel better by now." "I'm hoping to get back to work." "We had hoped the chemo would get all of the tumor." "We were hoping to go on vacation, but we can't afford it now."

What we wanted didn't come. What came, we didn't want. The result? Shattered hope. Disappointment. Despair. When hopes are crushed, the pilot light goes out in our eyes. There is no more deadening feeling than to feel hopeless. We trudge down the long road to Emmaus dragging our sandals in the dust, heads down, shoulders stooped in defeat. We're wondering what we did to deserve such a plight. "What kind of God would let me down like this? I had hoped it would be better than this." Our eyes are so tear-filled and our perspective so limited that God could be the fellow walking next to us and we wouldn't know it.

You see, the problem with our two heavy-hearted friends was not a lack of faith, but a lack of vision. It wasn't a lack of hope, but a hope in the wrong destination. Those two disciples, walking to Emmaus that Easter night, had one thing on their minds, the cross. They looked at what happened and compared that to what they had been

hoping for, and they came to this conclusion, the cross ruined everything! If it hadn't been for the cross, things would have been great.

We're not much different than those weak and heavy-laden travelers, are we? We do things out of order and wonder why we struggle in our marriage. We piously ask for God's will to be done and then have the audacity to pout when things go according to God's will and not ours. We take all week off from God and then wonder why our faith is so weak. We cut ourselves off from God's Word and Sacrament, and then we wonder why our children misbehave and disbelieve the way they do. We want to be followers of Christ, but without the cross. We want to be faithful to Christ, as long as we don't have to suffer. We want the glory, without the humility. Everything would be great ... if God would just remove those bothersome crosses.

But God won't do that. He simply loves you too much to pamper your sin and indulge your idolatry. And so, Jesus came to those two doubting and disappointed disciples and showed them how the cross was not a surprise but that the cross was necessary. His death was necessary. Not for ruin, but for good. Not to shatter hope, but to give hope. The cross was not the defeat that it appeared but was part of God's plan of victory over sin, death, and the devil. The plan revealed from the very beginning. The plan and victory sealed and accomplished in his resurrection that very morning.

They listened. Their hearts were burning within them. But they didn't quite get it. They were thick-headed and slow-hearted, just like we often are. Because when you're on that road without hope, when you're in the thick of the struggle, it's easy to hear the words, but hard to believe. Our problem is not so much that God doesn't give us what we hope for as it is that we don't know the right thing for which to hope.

Hope is not what you expect. Hope is not a Disney princess movie ending. It is Jesus unpacking the Word of God for you, like he did for those disciples, so your heart may burn within you, warming you up, melting your cold heart, putting you on fire for the Lord. You find this unbelievable hope when you dig through Scripture and find the centennial Abraham sitting with his infant son on his lap; Moses standing between two walls of Red Sea water; Joshua walking over the ruined walls of Jericho; David rocking the giant Goliath to sleep; Samson bringing the house down on the Philistines; Daniel petting a pride of purring lions; four men walking in a fiery furnace; and a teenage virgin pregnant with the Son of God. Hope is the two Emmaus-bound pilgrims reaching out to take a piece of bread only to see candlelight shining through the holes in the stranger's hands.

**“When he reclined at the table with them, he took bread, blessed it, thanks, broke it, and began giving it to them. Suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Then he vanished from their sight.”** And even though he vanished, they were not sad. For they now knew Jesus was not gone. Their faith was no longer in glory, but in the cross. Their faith was no longer downcast because of the corpse in the grave, but it was now joyful because of the empty tomb. They had found Jesus' promises in his Word. So, they rushed to Jerusalem, no longer confused, but certain, no longer hopeless, but burning with hope.

And we are, too. For the Good Shepherd has come and found each of us lost sheep, and has invited us here, to his house, a refuge for weary pilgrims. And he stays with us. He is here, opening the Scriptures, so we may hear and believe. Inviting us to his altar where he is both the priest and the sacrifice. Inviting us to stay and eat at his Table, where he is both host and food. Giving you bread that is his body and wine that is his blood. Opening your eyes to see your sin, but even greater that your eyes see your Savior from sin.

So, we come to this place weary, and we leave refreshed. We come scared and depressed, and we leave with our hearts burning with faith. We come without hope, questioning if God really cares and we leave with the hope and assurance that our God is with us always. The road to Emmaus is a fascinating story. **It's a Road of Hope.** Jesus wouldn't waste his time walking with us along this road if there was no hope. We now have a new lease on life. Pretty perceptive, don't you think? Amen.