

We Had Hoped
Cooke's-Portsmouth

Luke 24:13-35

The Emmaus Road is a lovely story peculiar to Luke. All that Luke apprises is that two people are making their way to Emmaus following the Passover celebration in Jerusalem and were talking about the events that had transpired in Jerusalem. It is later on the same day as the resurrection and they make their way awed, confused, and dispirited. Their hopes for the future have been dashed such that they cannot assimilate the good news of resurrection. As they make their way they are joined by a third person who asks them what they had been chatting about.

The two show the very human response of utter surprise. Surely this person must be the only one who appears to be in the dark over the events of the preceding days. The two pilgrims tell all; including appraisal of their dashed hopes that Jesus was the one who would redeem Israel but this appears not to be the case. Despite having heard the reports that some women had discovered the empty tomb and had been informed by angels of his resurrection, neither the aforementioned women nor the curious disciples who went to the garden had seen him. It was a mystery and conundrum of epic proportion. We had hoped.

Three little words fraught with layer upon layer of implication. Would they return to Emmaus and begin hoping for another weaver of words and worker of miracles to appear and gain notoriety? Would they simply resort to being good and faithful sons of Abraham? Was this Passover destined to be remembered as the one of dashed hopes and cruel demise? Would there

be explaining to do with naysayers back home who had debated with them all along about who Jesus of Nazareth truly was?

We had hoped that the culmination of prophecy was at hand.

We had hoped that he was the long awaited.

We had hoped to experience the redemption of Israel.

We had hoped.

David Lose, in his commentary on the text, has written, Notice that it's a road. Not an upper room or garden or mountain top or any of the other places we expect revelation to take place. It's a road. And it's not a pronouncement or discourse, but a conversation.

Sometimes the move from doubt, fear, and grief to faith, hope, and love takes both the time it takes to walk from one town to another and open, honest conversation. The implicit grief of shattered dreams echoes down through the ages from post Calvary to the present day. On the Emmaus Road it began with the disillusionment of "we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel." In our experience it might be, "we had hoped our child would recover," or "we had hoped that this job would last," or "we had hoped for a clearer outcome" or "that the cancer would go into remission" or "our church would grow."

Most of us know from experience that few things are more painful than dashed hopes. It cuts right to the core and can result in disillusionment, depression and uncertainty. And so it was for those two on the road to Emmaus. And along comes Jesus to join them mid conversation when they are still confused and disappointed. And the way that Jesus becomes involved in the journey is quite remarkable. Before the theological talk; before he opened up the scriptures as a means of putting the events of Passover into some kind of reasonable perspective; before breaking the

bread, Jesus joined them on the journey and was prepared to listen to the nature of their conversation and dashed hope.

Though the pilgrims do not recognize in whose company they walk, their hearts burn with passion as this wise stranger reminds them of the story of God's plan for salvation, going back to the time of Moses. He slowly and intentionally recounts the verses in the prophets that foretold the story of the Messiah's coming and events in his life. The dusty and old stories of ancient scrolls were not foremost in the minds of the pilgrims that day as they made their way home to Emmaus, following the celebration of Passover in Jerusalem. Slowly their passion began to be rekindled as their memories were stirred. When they reach Emmaus the stranger was invited to stay the night with them, as he appeared to be traveling further and the hospitality mores of the day dictated that he should be given an invitation. In being offered the bread and wine of communion their eyes were opened. Jesus then quickly disappears but the two disciples, though weary from making the journey to Emmaus, are re-energized, and, backtrack to Jerusalem to inform the other disciples of the experience.

Hope has been restored. What a significant text for us to consider on this anniversary Sunday.

Today we celebrate the journey of two congregations who went through the process of Exodus; leaving two long standing congregations and buildings to amalgamate into a new one. Today is not just the celebration of one anniversary but in fact, of several. We celebrate the Exodus and the amalgamation of 1964. We celebrate the first service of the two congregations in September of 1965 in St Thomas More School. We celebrate the 50th anniversary of the dedication of this

beautiful building and in so doing we mark the Exodus from the old, the sojourn in the figurative wilderness in rented space as community was formed and gaining the Promised Land of a new building. Every church anniversary is a celebration of the Judeo-Christian story as well as a celebration of the body of Christ.

We celebrate the lives of those who have served the leadership of this congregation beginning with Sam Delve. We celebrate the individuals and families who have gathered faithfully over the decades and the ensuing weddings, baptisms and funerals when community came together in solidarity of joy or grief. I was personally privileged to preside over the baptism of our granddaughter Emma and our daughter Erica's wedding in this space.

I have been privileged to work with Andrea Putnam and Kate Van Allen since 2013 and with Darrell Bryan since 2014. We celebrate the continued empowering of the laity. Rave reviews on the service conducted last Sunday by the Cherry Family are still pouring in. I anticipate future coverage in the same spirit of excellence when I am on vacation this July with a roster of lay volunteers who will engage and inspire. The Emmaus Road stretches out behind us in history and ahead of us in anticipation and uncertainty. And the Judeo-Christian is not all joy and celebration as we well know.

The Garden of Eden was given and then subsequently taken away. Our forefathers and foremothers knew gaining and losing the Promised Land. They knew exile and returning home to a city in ruins that needed rebuilding. And pieces of the age old story imbedded and recorded in scripture continues to be experienced today in our generation.

This week I watched as a Genie Lift was used to open up the roof on the south west corner of the peak to expose what is under the shingles to help us understand the nature of the staining that runs along the peak from fore to aft. This should result in a full report of findings; probable causes and possible solutions. Once the report is received the Board and congregation will need to seriously consider and discuss the stewardship of this building and the stewardship of the lives and families that continue to make up the congregation. We will need to prayerfully and mindfully consider our present and future.

I know that there are some who believe quite strongly that Cooke's-Portsmouth will have a presence here for many years to come. I also know that there are those who have serious concerns over the demographics of our congregation. Like the men on the Emmaus Road we too are on a journey. And like those two individuals we may need to have our eyes open to the presence of the one who walks with us. We too have hope.

We hope that we will have a presence for some time to come. We hope that every decision that we make will have the best interest of the immediate and the longer term future at stake. But perhaps the greatest hope that we need to embrace, model and work towards is the commitment to be a resurrection people.

A people not easily dismayed by confusing current events.

A people ready to celebrate and support others in the triumphs and tragedies of life.

A people who will dare to believe that we do not make the journey of the Emmaus Road without the presence of the Christ at our sides reminding us of who we are to whom we belong.

Instilling within us the power of our shared story of faith that includes the miracle of creation, the travesty of war, the celebration of victory, the pain of loss as well as the hope of resurrection. This is our hope.

A hope that may disappear and allude for a while like on the original Emmaus Road. We too may need the reassuring voice of Christ reminding us of the triumphs and tragedies of the Judeo-Christian story that have always had a place in its telling. We are always on a journey.

The road before us may be shrouded in mystery and obscure but if we allow ourselves the permission to believe in the unseen presence, we may just feel our hearts burn within us in passion as the accompanying Christ reminds us that we are not alone.

We had hoped. We live in hope. Happy Anniversary! Amen.

