

**Beyond what we had hoped**

“now on that same day...”

On that same day—when Mary Magdalene, Joanne and Mary the mother of Jesus went—at early dawn to the tomb—carrying spices...

On that same day, when angels appeared, the stone was rolled away and the tomb lay empty...

On that same day, when Mary Magdalene heard the voice of her friend whom she thought was dead, speak her name...

On that same day, when Peter and John ran to the tomb and found the grave clothes lying where the women said they would be...

On that same day, we get this story...

Of two disciples, heading away from Jerusalem and toward the village of Emmaus.

We can't help but wonder—"why were they going to Emmaus?"

They had heard the good news, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, angels had appeared in dazzling white clothes announcing “why are you looking for the living among the dead—he isn't here—he is alive!” and if that wasn't enough—the women had proclaimed—for the very first time—that they had seen with their own eyes, the risen and living Christ!

So why in the world, were these two disciples, making the long journey toward Emmaus?

Well as it turns out—even with angels, empty tombs and first hand accounts of the resurrection—these disciples still didn't know what to make of everything that had happened. What did it all mean? Was Jesus really raised from the dead? Or had his body been taken somewhere else? Was the act of taking his body just another form of cruel punishment, salt poured into the wound, by the same powers of empire that had nailed him to a cross? Could what had happened to Jesus, now happen to them?

With so much unknown, they did what made the most sense—they made their way out of town.

As they walk, they start to process “all these things that had happened.”

We don't know exactly what their conversation was like but we can imagine...

The Passover dinner where Jesus washed their feet, broke bread and poured wine—talking about a new commandment...to love one another...

That night, spent in the garden where Jesus seemed agitated, wrestling in prayer and they couldn't stay awake.

The appearance of Judas, the act of betrayal by a beloved friend,

Jesus violent arrest, how they had all scattered leaving him alone, in the hands of the empire.

The trial that took place in the middle of the night,

the order of execution,

the long walk to Golgotha,

the agonizing few hours Jesus hung on the cross,

the longest day of their lives...

and now the tomb is empty..

How...how had all of these things happened?

While they're talking suddenly a stranger is on the road with them and joins their conversation "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

If there was ever a bad time to have a stranger barge into a conversation this would probably be a big one. But somehow—this gentle question, opens a conversation.

The disciples stop, and for the first time we get a glimpse into how they're feeling "they stood still, looking sad." Maybe it had been fear of what would happen to them that led them to leave Jerusalem, or maybe, it was also deep sadness—a grief that made them want to get away from the place that had caused so much pain and confusion.

As they begin to talk, the stranger lets them tell their story; they express who Jesus of Nazareth was, a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all people, and how the leaders had handed him over to be crucified—slowly we get down to what lies at the heart of their sadness; shattered hope.

"But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

The disciples had placed all of their hope of Jesus being the Messiah who would topple the Roman Empire, reestablish and redeem Israel—and for them that dream had been nailed to a cross—the body laid in the grave, a grave which was now empty—and the body of their their Messiah...was missing...

Talk about a deep sadness.

After listening to the disciples, the stranger, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, started to connect the dots—showing that, while the disciples had had hopes for what the Messiah would be, God was up to something even more.

As they neared the village—the stranger kept going—acting as though they were going to continue on—but the disciples urged him to stay.

Sitting down at the table together their guest did something familiar—just like the disciples had witnessed on a hill side in front of a crowd of over 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, and just like a couple nights ago in an upper room during the Passover meal with a small group of friends—their guest took bread, blessed, broke and gave it to them...

Suddenly what they were not able to recognize on the road became clear—their friend, their messiah, whom they thought was dead, the hope which had been shattered and buried in the tomb, sealed by an unforgiving stone that declared the truth that their hope had been missed placed—was now sitting at the table with them.

I find this story comforting right now.

Because as Easter people, who believe in the resurrection, we've seen the empty tomb. And at the same time, we're also holding on to the things we had hoped for.

Schools are closed, graduation celebrations are canceled, jobs have been lost, businesses closed, our health care systems stressed beyond capacity, loved ones are sick, lives have been lost—and our way of living has been completely upended.

In the midst of all we're experiencing, this story reminds us that in our messy, broken, fear filled and deeply loved world, the good news of the resurrection takes time.

We may see the empty tomb but be at a loss for what it means.

We may hear good news but wonder how it applies to us.

Just like the disciples walking down a lonely road, we're attempting to tell and retell our stories, wanting to make sense of "all these things that have happened."

And this story makes us wonder, what if God is up to something bigger—inviting us to look beyond what we think we know...to something greater than that for which we had hoped?

This isn't meant to be putting on rose colored glasses—because the pain we are feeling and experiencing is real. However—the situation we're in is not beyond God's redeeming. So what could resurrection look like for us here and now?

During this time, we're recognizing that grocery store checkers and baggers, delivery drivers, postal workers, custodial crews and maintenance staff, just to name a few, are essential workers—could resurrection look like paying a living wage?

This crisis is throwing into sharp relief just how broken our healthcare system is—could resurrection look like ensuring that everyone regardless of their employment have access to the care they deserve at a price they can afford?

We're seeing how communities of color are being disproportionately affected by this virus and experiencing a higher rate of mortality—could resurrection look having open, honest and challenging dialogue about the role of systemic racism in our country, how it plays out today during the time of crisis, and what it means to work toward a more just and equitable world?

The move to online learning is showing us the disparity between wealthy communities where access to the internet and a computer at home is putting some ahead, while others are left behind—could resurrection look like ensuring that all children and youth have access to equal opportunities to learn? As airline travel slows, fewer cars are on the road and industries are working at a lower capacity—we're getting a real time glimpse into how our behavior has human beings has directly impacted the environment—could resurrection look like a renewed effort toward reducing our carbon foot print in order to care for God's creation?

This is indeed a challenging, chaotic, and uncertain time—but the God we profess is one who speaks order out of chaos, makes a dry path through the sea, calms a storm with a word, brings healing with a touch, and where the stench of death lingers in the air, our God calls forth life.

Dear friends, we may have more questions than answers, and be deep in our sadness of losing the life style and that for which we hoped.

But it's in these places that God is present.

God is moving in the darkness calling forth new life—even before our eyes can see it.

God is joining us on the road, asking what we're discussing along the way.

God is listening to our deep sadness and shattered hopes.

God is helping connect the dots, allowing us to see a bigger picture.

God is waiting for us to invite them in and sit at the table--revealing their presence through broken bread, to remind us that even as we question, wonder, doubt, mourn, and begin to see what God is up to in the world—we are not alone but fed by the Spirit along the way.

God is on the move,

will we watch and listen,

allowing our hearts to burn,

will we not only run and tell the good news,

but will we become co-workers with God, helping to bring about a world, and reality, better than that for which we had ever hoped?

Because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

May it be so for you and for me. Amen

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