

This story from Luke is near the top of my list of favorite post-resurrection stories. This story takes place on Easter. Jesus had encountered Mary and the other women at the empty tomb. Near the end of the story, we hear that Jesus had encountered Peter. I'm not sure of the exact chronology of events of when the risen Christ visited Mary, Peter, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, but I know that it doesn't matter. This story is not about specific and precise details. Rather, this story is about the Risen Christ showing up in our lives when we least expect him, showing up when we're walking home, opening our eyes during an ordinary meal around an ordinary table. Yes, I absolutely love this story.

I love the small little details in this passage that stand out like a neon sign. Their hearts were burning when they heard the Word proclaimed. Their eyes were opened while eating a simple meal. And then there are three little words in English that stand out for me in this passage. As I was doing my reading for this passage, I read several commentaries on this passage where the authors all discussed three little words in English...we had hoped. Did you catch those words in this passage? Verse 21 reads, "We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago." We had hoped. We had hoped that Jesus was the one who would return things to the way they were before Rome came and conquered our land. We had hoped that Jesus would be the one who restored our country's good name and reputation. We had hoped for redemption. These three little words in the English language pack quite the punch, don't they?

"We had hoped" packs quite the punch because it sums up all the emotions we have in life for dreams unfulfilled. They remind us of that which could have been had only things gone differently. They speak to our hopes dashed and dreams that have gone away. For the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they summarize the last three years of Jesus' life and ministry, as well as their hope for their people. They had hoped over the last three years that Jesus would have come in and kicked out Pontius Pilate and his puppet Herod. They had hoped that things would have been different. But their dreams and hopes of an independent and free Israel did not come to pass. For them, their hopes died on Good Friday with Jesus.

And I don't have to think too hard to know that these three words have been spoken a lot by all of us over the last 6 weeks. Graduating seniors have undoubtedly said, "we had hoped we could have our prom and graduation." Teachers have undoubtedly said, "we had hoped that we could have said goodbye to our students." I know us pastors have said, "we had hoped that we could have had Easter service together." Yes, all of us have probably been saying those three words a lot recently. This Corona Virus has changed our lives and there are lots of things that will be changed forever. Many of us are just now coming to terms with the realization of the punch packed in those three little words "we had hoped".

But here's the good news, dear Church. I promise that there is good news in this story and in the midst of our lives right now. The good news in the story of the road to Emmaus is that it doesn't end with "we had hoped", does it? It doesn't end with the disciples walking away sad that their dreams went unfulfilled, does it? It ends with their eyes being opened to the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives. It ends with them returning to gathered community of disciples and proclaiming the good news first proclaimed by Mary Magdalene... "we have seen the Lord." This story is one of hope in the midst of grief, promise in the midst of broken dreams, and new life in the midst of death.

We don't know what is going to happen over the next several weeks in our community, our state, our country, or in the world. That is true. There is going to be a lot more grief and sadness and loss. And I, by no means, want to discourage you from experiencing those things, nor do I want to minimize them. What I hope you hear is that, in the midst of grief and sadness and loss, Jesus shows up and sits down to eat with us. Jesus walks with us and listens to us as we share our grief. He shows up and opens up Scriptures for us. We are not alone. Grief is not the last word. Death is not the last word. "We had hoped" are not the last words. No! We have seen the Lord are the last words.

I hope that in the midst of all that is going on over the next several weeks, you take the time to see the good that is going on. When the food pantry was running low, our community came together and helped restock their shelves. There are those who come by our house and bring us a meal right when we could use a warm smile and a warm meal. There are the doctors and nurses and hospital workers who are working very long and hard hours to care for our loved ones when we can't be by their bedside. All around us, even in the locked doors of our house, are signs of hope and promise and love. All around us are signs of the resurrection and hope and new life promised in Jesus. They are there. May your eyes be opened and your hearts burn with joy this day and every day. Things are going to be ok soon. I don't know when things will be ok again, but I keep my hope alive in the one who conquered death itself to redeem the whole world. Amen and Amen.