

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

26th April, 2020 – Third Sunday of Easter

LUKE 24:13-35

HOPE BEYOND THE CROSS

It should be no surprise to us that the theme of hope keeps on coming out in our Bible readings in these weeks of Easter. Two weeks ago, on Easter Sunday, we had the growing hope of Jesus' followers as they started to accept that He really wasn't dead but alive as He had promised. Last week our theme was 'Living in Hope', as we thought about how as post-Easter believers we can now know the hope Jesus brings us in our lives. And today, with our Gospel reading telling the account of Jesus meeting two of His followers on the road to Emmaus, and then gradually revealing to them who He is as He explains the Bible to them and then breaks bread with them, we have the theme, 'Hope Beyond the Cross'; Jesus comes to us where we are, giving us hope to move forward, to live in His hope and love, and to share the great truth of who He is with others.

This account of Jesus and His followers on the road to Emmaus always makes me think about a story I read a number of years ago. The story is about how every year, in the Italian Alps, thousands of people climb a mountain to walk past a display known as the 'Stations of the Cross'. You may have come across these displays before. A Stations of the Cross display contains scenes, normally about 12 or 14, from the Easter story. Sometimes these are done in a church, with people moving from one station to another with perhaps a picture, a Bible reading and a reflection on each one focusing on the events surrounding Jesus' death. Other times they are done on a much bigger scale outside, as with this one in Italy. So each year, at the end of their trek up the mountain passing each of the stations and reflecting on what had happened, people came and stood before a large outdoor crucifix, supposedly the end of their journey, and the story. One year though, a visiting tourist noticed a faint trail going on to the other side of the cross. Fighting his way through the bushes which had grown over this trail through the years he came to a small empty cave, with its entrance stone rolled away, symbolising the empty tomb, new life, and the real ending of the story. It had been neglected for years, overgrown and forgotten. Visitors had gone as far as the cross, but then stopped there.

Easter doesn't finish with the cross. The hope we have in Easter comes from seeing, believing and living in the news of the empty tomb.

It can be hard sometimes though, can't it, to move beyond the cross? That's what the two followers of Jesus who are in our Bible reading today were struggling to do. Only one of them are named, and he is not one of the 12, and there is no reason to believe the other one is either. But, from what happens we know they knew Jesus well and were two of His faithful followers.

It's the evening of Easter Sunday. So much has happened in just a week. From the height of Palm Sunday to the death of Jesus on the cross they and all of Jesus' followers are struggling to make sense of it all. And then, after all of that, some other followers this morning, the third day after Jesus had died, came to say the tomb was empty and an angel had told them Jesus is alive. What to make of that? Confused, disappointed, sad, afraid, they have decided to head back to their hometown of Emmaus, perhaps to try and pick their lives up again.

As they make their journey back, a 'stranger' joins them on their walk. We know it is Jesus, but they don't.

Their eyes are closed by their unfulfilled dreams and expectations. They had had such high hopes that Jesus would save Israel as God had been promising for thousands of years. Instead it seems he was just another prophet. After three years of listening to Him and seeing what He could do, His death on the cross happened so quickly, and with such finality. Disappointment and disillusion prevent them from seeing who is now before them.

Their eyes are closed by their worries about their current situation. The Jewish leaders and Romans had killed Jesus to stop the spread of His movement and message, who's to say they wouldn't also now begin to start killing His followers. Where could they go to be safe? When the One who can protect them comes to them, their worries prevent them from seeing Him.

And their eyes are closed by their fears about the future. Without Jesus, what would they do now? They had put all their hopes in Him. Why even think any more about the Messiah and what He might do for God's people? What would now happen to them, their families, and to all of God's people? In their fear, they can't see that walking with them is the One they can always trust in.

In their disappointment, their worries, and their fears, these two men can't move beyond Easter to see and believe the hope which is for them in the risen Jesus who is walking with them.

Jesus comes to them, as He comes so many times in the Gospels to people who need Him. As He comes to us today. Firstly, hearing them talk about the events He has been through but which they don't understand, He teaches them from the Bible what these things mean and why they had to happen. While they still don't know who He is, they later comment to each other how their hearts were warmed when He spoke to them like this. Their eyes are opened by the Bible so they can see Jesus.

And then, when they arrive at their house, they ask Jesus to stay with them. As Jesus joins them in their meal, the guest becomes the host. Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. Sound familiar? There can be no doubt that this is a direct connection between what Jesus did with the disciples at the Last Supper, and how He comes to us today each time we celebrate Holy Communion together. And then, we are told, at once they knew who He was.

Through God's Word and through this special meal, which we now call Holy Communion, the eyes of Jesus' followers are opened. They can now look beyond the cross to the risen Jesus. Their disappointment, their worries and their fears are gone, and instead, filled with joy, they immediately make the journey back to Jerusalem to tell the others what they have seen and heard. Moving beyond the cross gives them hope.

It is such a well-told account that Luke gives us here, and there is so much in it. For today though, I ask you to think about that hope these two followers of Jesus had after their eyes were opened by the Bible teaching and sharing that special meal with Him.

Their eyes had been closed by their disappointments, their worries and their fears. We may all at different times have things which close our eyes to Jesus and the hope He offers to us. Are concerns around our current situation; financial worries, a sense of loss of things you can't do, missing people you can't see or be with, worries about the future and how things will work out, are any of these making it hard for you to see Jesus and His hope in your life?

Or are there other things, issues, situations, relationships, worries, circumstances, which put you on that road to Emmaus, knowing what has happened to Jesus but finding it hard to see the hope and new life which are beyond the cross?

Jesus came to His followers, many times, just as He still comes to us today. He helps us to move beyond the cross by coming to us where we are. The living Jesus gives us a hope which is with us in whatever we go through. Look at the cross and remember all that was done for us there and what it means. But also move beyond the cross to live in the hope and new life which is ours through the empty tomb. Amen.

FUTHER DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Jesus Turns the Doom and Gloom Around

As the two followers of Jesus walked along the road to Emmaus they were full of doom and gloom. By revealing Himself to them Jesus turned this around.

- What things sometimes prevent you from seeing Jesus as the Risen Saviour who turns everything around for us?
- When you are feeling down, worried, or afraid, are there some things you can do to allow Jesus to come and reveal Himself to you?

2. The Ironies of this Story, and of our Lives

This account is so well written, and it has so many ironies in it: the followers of Jesus don't know who He is but we the readers do, they try to explain what has happened to the One who knows these events better than anyone else.

- What ironies are there in our relationship with God? For example, what examples of God's love and care do we sometimes not see even though they are right in front of us?
- Is there one big point you can take out of this account to apply to your life right now?

3. God Reveals Himself to Us in His Word and the Sacraments

In hearing Jesus explain the Bible to them, and then sharing the special meal with Him, the disciples' eyes are finally opened. God still comes and shows Himself to us today whenever we read or hear His Word, when we remember that we are His through our Baptism, and when we share the Lord's Supper together.

- Sadly, we are unable to celebrate Holy Communion together at the moment, but we know that God is still with us. What are some things you can do at this time to remind you of God's love and presence with us, and of the hope that He brings?
- The Bible plays a large part in revealing God to us and keeping us close to Him. Does reading the Bible have a place in your week, or your day? If not, what can you do to expose yourself to God's Word and what it is saying to you?

4. Go and Tell!

This keeps coming up throughout the Easter account: when people know that Jesus is alive, they can't do anything but go and tell everyone else about it. The news is too good not to share.

- Think about the news that we can go beyond the cross to the empty tomb, and even more than that, that we now see and have a relationship with the Risen Jesus. What does this mean for you? How can you now share with others what a difference this hope brings to your life?