

**Luke 24:13-35**

**EXPECTANT HOPE**

When you have one of those moments or experiences, and I'm assuming we all have them at different times and to different degrees, when everything just gets on top of you, you feel like the rug has been pulled out from under your feet, you are struggling to keep your head above water (whatever metaphor you want to use), how do you like people to respond to you? You know, everything has started to go really bad, nothing is turning out the way you hoped it would, and, unfortunately, even the most well-meaning of people can then come along and try to support you in a way that just makes it worst for you. I feel like we should each carry a card which we can hand to people when we get like this, and it says, 'If I am seeming to be either slightly overwhelmed or going through a major meltdown, or anything in between, please then ...?' What would you put on that card? Do you like people to come along and give you advice, asking you if you have tried things which you most obviously have? Do you like someone to give a supportive listening ear, enabling you to talk through the situation with no judgment or quick advice? Do you want someone to just be there, saying nothing, as support? Would you like someone to pray with you? Do you want to be just straight out left alone to work things through for yourself? On a show we are watching currently there was a couple for whom things weren't going well in the life around them, and when the wife was just letting it all out and saying, 'I just don't know how we are going to get ourselves through all this', she turned to her husband who was about to speak and said to him, 'and if you tell me, "there, there, it will all be ok", I am going to scream at you', at which point he very diplomatically closed his mouth. How do you like people to respond when you have lost all sense of hope and it all just overwhelms you?

We can all have those times in our lives, when the way we had hoped things would turn out doesn't, at that point, end up being the case. In today's Gospel reading from Luke 24, for the third time in the past three Sundays we are told how Jesus' earlier followers and friends responded to His death and then the 'rumours' of His rising again. These two followers of Jesus were returning home after the events of the

Passover weekend. But, even more than that, they are returning home having seen the One who they thought was the Messiah, God's promised Saviour, be put to death, thus ending all their hopes that He would free God's people. To make it even more confusing, some other followers of Jesus claimed to have seen Jesus alive again. As Jesus joins them on their walk and they explain why they are feeling as down as they do, the irony of it all is that they are actually talking to the one they are talking about. But, like Mary Magdelene, in their sorrow and fear they don't recognise who He is. Like Thomas, their logic won't allow them to believe in what Jesus said would happen. Perhaps too it is their lack of hope now which makes them blind to who they are actually walking with here. In verse 21 they say to Jesus, 'We had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free! But it has already been three days since all this happened.'

'We had hoped..... But.....'. It's a good combination of words to make us feel hopeless and despondent, isn't it? There are many ways that we can fill those words in to make us lose hope. 'We had hoped that they would make a full recovery, but sadly that wasn't to be the case'. 'I had hoped that relationship could be restored, but we just weren't able to do that'. 'I had hoped that my life would be in a different place by this stage, but this is where I find myself right now'. 'We had hoped that we could all get through this, but things were just too far gone'. 'We had hoped we would be living in a world in which love and compassion would direct how people treat one another, but too often hatred, greed, revenge, and jealousy get the upper hand'. 'We/I had hoped ..... But .....'. Do you have times in the past, or right now, which you could put into that sentence?

Among many other things we learn in the Easter story, we learn that, in Jesus, God comes to us both in those times when we feel full of hope, and also those times when our hope has left us. To Mary Magdelene outside the tomb Jesus came to her in her fears and sadness and gave her the peace and comfort of His presence. To Thomas and his doubts Jesus came and said, 'here is the proof you require to know I am alive again'. As we have seen over the past two weeks, Jesus coming to us, responding to where we are at, isn't done in judgement, but in response to what we need.

And now, to these two followers of Jesus who think their hopes in the Saviour are all over, Jesus comes to reveal Himself to them. Firstly, He uses God's Word to show that everything which had happened

is what God had promised and planned. I don't know how these two preferred people to respond when they were feeling down, but sometimes it's better if people don't just do what we want them to, and here they are getting a straightforward lesson in how things were not what they now seem to be. Later they even admit to one another that they felt a warming of their hearts (hope?) when Jesus spoke to them like this.

Then, when they arrive home, they invite Jesus to join them for a meal. Here, the guest becomes the host. What is significant for us here is how Luke describes what Jesus does here: He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Sound familiar? It's the same as what Jesus does in the John 6 Feeding of the Five Thousand, where Jesus also says, 'I am the Bread of Life.' The same also as what Jesus does in the other three Gospels at the Last Supper. The link between what Jesus does here and that special meal is very strong, and made even more so by what happens then: 'At once they knew who He was' (31a). Jesus is revealed in the breaking of the bread as He comes to them.

Like we have seen from Easter Sunday on, the Risen Jesus comes to people where they are at, giving them what they need in their lives. What makes what happens in this reading a bit different from the last two, is that while we can't see Jesus as Mary Magdelene did, or touch His wounds as Thomas was invited to do, like the two followers in this story we can hear the words of promise in God's Word and how they are fulfilled, and we can take part in this meal where Jesus comes to us and shares with us His body and blood in the bread and wine. We can put ourselves in the picture as those who hear, as those who receive. In our Lutheran teaching we call this Word and Sacrament; how God comes to us in a very real way, through the Holy Spirit at work through the Bible, through Holy Communion, and we add baptism in there as well. God comes in Jesus in these ways not just to make Himself known to us, but also to give us the hope we are looking for, the peace we are seeking, the direction we struggle to find, the forgiveness we need to deal with our guilt.

All of this means that while we still go through those struggles, those times of hopelessness, or despair, or guilt, Jesus comes to us in those times to lead us through them. In the same way He came to comfort and strengthen those believers on that first Easter Sunday evening, He comes to us also; through God's Word, through Holy Communion. Reminding us of God's promises for us, and how they have been

fulfilled in Jesus. Telling us again and again that we can rely on God's love, God's care, God's forgiveness, God's strength, in all that we face in our lives. And in His meal, Holy Communion, as we receive the body and blood of Jesus with the bread and wine, 'given and shed for you', we hear; 'I died for you. I rose for you. I am always here for you'. That is a strength and a presence we can take with us whatever we go through, and it can't be taken from us. Where there was no hope, there is now hope. Perhaps, to oversimplify it a bit, on that card we might carry to give to people when things get on top of us, we could write; 'If I am seeming to be either slightly overwhelmed or going through a major meltdown, or anything in between, I need God'. And in Jesus, by God's Word and in the Sacraments, God still continues to come to us today.

As those who know that Jesus is alive, and that He still comes to us in our lives today, we don't have unfilled hope, but Expectant Hope as God continues to work in and through us in our lives. Instead of saying, 'We had hoped ... But...', we can now say, 'We had hoped .... And ...'. Because in God's Word, in Holy Communion, in our Baptism, Jesus continues to come to us today, we can put ourselves in the picture of those who know Him and receive all He promises, no matter what we go through. May our hearts be warmed, and may we continue to recognise our Saviour and what He does in our lives each day. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Do you have a preference for how you like people to respond to you when things get on top of you: just listen, give advice, leave you alone, pray with you, something else?
- How do you feel those two followers of Jesus would have been feeling on Easter Sunday evening as they despondently returned home? Would they at first have appreciated Jesus speaking to them so directly?
- Have a look at this reading, and think about how God's Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion speak into the lives of these followers so directly. How does what Jesus reveals to them through God's Word change their sense of hopelessness? How does recognising the risen Jesus through the breaking of the bread change how they now feel about and respond to all that has happened?
- Reflect on the role God's Word and Holy Communion play in your relationship with God. Do you find comfort in them? Do you come to 'see' the risen Jesus as your Saviour through them? How does the Holy Spirit work through these means of God's grace to give you an expectant hope in your life?

Pray: thank God for revealing the risen Jesus to us still today through His Word and Sacraments. Ask Him to help us to look to Him for our hope and strength in all we go through.

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