

## **SERMON: Luke 24:13-35**

### **It Is True**

Three little words tell you everything you need to know about these two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “we had hoped.”

**<sup>21</sup> ...we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.**

At some point, hope had been there. Hope that Jesus was the Messiah. Hope that he would redeem his people. Hope that all of this wouldn't end the way it had. And that's really the problem, isn't it? We're told that these disciples are heading out of Jerusalem on “that same day.” The very day that the tomb is found empty, the very day that Jesus had said he would rise again, the very day that reports circulate of angels and a missing body.

**<sup>21</sup> ...we had hoped...**

Three little words. And all in the past tense. They had hoped. But that hope was gone now.

The older I get, the more often I find myself walking along in the shadow of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And maybe I don't often speak those three words to complete strangers like they did...but that doesn't mean that hope is thriving and blooming in those shadows. Because it's not. Sometimes it feels as if hope is only in the past tense.

And I wonder if you have times like that, too.

*We had hoped...* How do you complete that sentence? We had hoped that our family gathering would be calm and relaxing and enjoyable. But some people were missing, the food was overcooked, and then crazy Uncle Jerry started spouting politics, and the day turned into one big fight. We had hoped that our school would be a safe and stable place in the chaos of the world. But then the staff was divided by district policies...or the parents started throwing a fit about classroom procedures...or a gunman came through the doors, even with security measures in place. We had hoped that the joyful glow of Easter would stick around, at least for a while. But then there were cutbacks at work. Gas and grocery prices kept rising. And the world seems to be getting crazier by the minute.

*We had hoped...*that God was the one who could do something about this, who absolutely *would* do something about this. But now we wonder.

That's where those three words inevitably take us, don't they? Maybe we had hopes for something simple and easy and good—something we know that God says he wants for us—like good family relationships or contentment at work and school. Maybe we had hopes for something bigger, something related to the deeper questions about me and my place in this world, like why I still struggle with anxiety or depression, or how I live my faith in a challenging workplace. Whatever those hope are, when these aren't addressed specifically, or maybe aren't addressed the way we would expect them to be, it's easy to lose hope. It's easy for us to echo the same three words of those two disciples. It becomes easy for us not to see the empty tomb as a proof of salvation, but as evidence that something is missing, that something is wrong.

**<sup>21</sup> ...we had hoped...**

But that raises the question: What is hope, really?

What is hope? The expression of what we want? (I hope I get that job. I hope the day goes well.) The interplay of probability? (I hope it rains today. I hope summer comes soon.) That's not the way the Bible talks about hope. At all. That's not the way Jesus talks about hope. Right here. Hope—in the realm of God himself, in the revelation of his Word—is this: a certainty that is yet to be realized.

Take a moment and notice how Jesus, disguised as a stranger, addresses these disciples and redirects their hope. Jesus uses an interesting strategy—one he used often throughout his ministry. When Nicodemus came to him in the middle of the night wondering who he was and how he was doing these miracles, what did Jesus say? “You have to be born again.” Wait! What?! That wasn't what Nicodemus asked at all. But it's the lesson Jesus knew Nicodemus needed to learn. When the Samaritan woman at the well came and found Jesus and heard him talk about living water, she wanted some so that she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well. And what did Jesus say? “Go, call your husband.” Wait! What?! That wasn't what she was talking about at all. But it's the lesson Jesus knew she needed.

And it's similar here. The disciples give a pretty good recitation of all that had happened in the last few days and even years. Jesus came and performed amazing miracles. He taught with parables and illustrations. He gathered followers, just like them. But then the rulers arrested him and put him to death. And then his tomb was found empty. “How do we understand this, Jesus? Why did this happen? What is going on? Where's our hope?”

**<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”**

Here's Jesus answer: “What does God's Word say?”

“No, Jesus, we're talking about these traumatic things that have happened. We're talking about how our families are struggling and our loved ones are dying. We're talking about how our world is falling apart and becoming more divisive by the day. We're talking about how I lost my job, and I can't pay my bills, and I'm depressed and anxious and lonely and forgotten. Where's our hope? Why do these things happen?”

**<sup>19</sup> “What things?” he asked.**

If we stand here with the two disciples, feeling the same shadow of hopelessness, then we also receive the same rebuke from Jesus. How foolish we are! How slow of heart to believe what God's Word actually says.

See, it wasn't just that these disciples were doubting the resurrection. Because if that's all it was, Jesus wouldn't have disguised himself. He would have pulled his cloak down from his head and said, “Ta-da! See! It's me! I'm alive!” It's that they had forgotten who Jesus was in the first place. Their hope was set on the wrong things.

Is my hope set on the wrong things, on promises that God doesn't make? Promises to have a stable family life or a good school or a thriving economy? Have I forgotten what God's Word actually says? Do I need to have my hope redirected?

Here's the beautiful thing: that's exactly what Jesus does. He uses the Word to redirect our hope. Remember what God's Word says. You are a sinner who needs a Savior. And there is Christ, your Savior. You are an orphan who longs for a family. And there is Christ, your brother, who brings you into God's family. You are a criminal who deserves punishment at the hands of the Righteous Judge. And there is Christ, your perfect substitute, who took that punishment on himself.

Your hope is not based on a pleasant, balanced, and predictable life. It's based on God's glorious promise of forgiveness, given and fulfilled in the Christ who lived and suffered and died for you.

And with hope redirected to the proper place, you also get the beautiful comfort of hope restored and refreshed.

That's what these two disciples got along the road to Emmaus. And it's fascinating how it all happens. What changes from the beginning of the story to the end of the story? From an outward perspective, nothing at all! They are still on the road. They have still witnessed these terrible atrocities in Jerusalem. And they still have a Savior who is gone. He was gone from the tomb, and he disappears before their eyes at the table where they ate. Nothing changed, from an outward perspective.

But everything changed in their hearts. The dark thoughts of hopelessness prompted by recent events...were destroyed by the timeless and unchanging Word of God. Aching hearts of grief...turned to burning hearts of joy. Disciples that were once foolish and slow to believe...became eager to run back to Jerusalem in the middle of the night and tell others. Hope was restored!

It's fascinating how this change happens in your own heart, too, isn't it? Along the road to Emmaus, it was a seeming stranger who redirected and restored the hope of these two disciples. As we walk in their shadow, it is often strange and even paradoxical things bring this redirection and restoration of hope. It is the often invisible work of the Spirit, whispering the name of your Savior into your heart. Sins are forgiven yet again, and hope is restored. It is ordinary bread and wine, at the same time body and blood, placed into your hands and your mouth: "Take and eat; take and drink." Faith is strengthened, and hope is restored. It is sometimes even the quiet comfort of a friend, a brother, a pastor, or even a relative stranger, who listens to you and hears you and speaks God's unchanging Word to you: "He is with you always, on this road to Emmaus, or wherever your journey takes you." Hope is restored.

And that reframes your life. It's not that you don't have those moments of difficulty or those trials of hopelessness. It's that you know again what your God says is true no matter what. His love isn't based on pleasant circumstance. His forgiveness doesn't change, even when our world does. His peace isn't only for this life, but for life eternal too.

So. Just as you learned that three little words tell you all you need to know about the troubles and difficulties of this life—"we had hoped"—you learn that three other little words tell you all you need to know about your God's love and grace and mercy, which restore your hope. It is true. It is true that your Savior lives. It is true that you have real hope, now and forever! It is true!

*The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*