

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

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Year A

But we had hoped that he was the one...

Of all the Easter stories, I think this one on the road to Emmaus is the most human. Maybe that's why it's a favorite for many of us – because we know these very ordinary characters. (Notice: these two are not even the big name disciples hanging out behind closed doors in Jerusalem.) We know these characters and we know all their lines. Maybe we even know their scenes and sets: the road they walked, just to get away, in Act I, the table they shared for Act II, and their headlong return to home base in Act III. But the characters on the road in that first Act are what we know the best. And the line we know best of all is one of our saddest, isn't it? *But we had hoped...*

They had been talking and walking, and walking and talking. It felt by now as if that was all there had ever been, just walking and talking and hope that had died. Their hearts and their minds were so tired and battered they couldn't stop rehearsing every detail over and over again, even though they knew they were getting nowhere with all their talk - just circling around the heartbreak of it all. And it seemed as if they had argued about everything, no matter how much it hurt their wounded hearts every time they brought up another lost hope, another defeat, another disappointment. *But we had hoped...*

But we had hoped... - the line you and I know best of all. How many of us can personally fill in the end of that sentence right now, this day, this week, this month - *But we had hoped...*? But we had hoped we would never make this mistake again. But we had hoped this job was going to be the answer. But we had hoped our children would be a happy delight at this time of life. But we had hoped the whole money thing would have worked out by now. But we had hoped this marriage would be easier by now. But we had hoped these friends would always stay the same with us. But we had hoped that this relationship was *the* relationship. But we had hoped we would never hurt like this again. But we had hoped we would know who we were going to be when we grew up, by now. But we had hoped that in our retirement would be carefree and wise. But we had hoped that this surgery... this new treatment, this medicine... But we had hoped that this move, this therapy, this town, this church, this school, this diet, this investment... *But we had hoped...*

Like every one of us, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus could list every dream of their lost hope, and every crushing detail of its defeat. And that's exactly what they were doing, yet one more time, when the stranger interrupted their circling with what sounded to them like such a stupid question: *What things are you talking about?* So they told him everything, just as they remembered it. They could *report* it all, everything they had seen and heard; but they could not recognize the meaning of it, any more than they could recognize him.

We human beings are so extravagantly gifted; and we are such meager users of our gifts. In fact, it is probably our giftedness itself that creates one of our greatest dilemmas. We have been created with the most brilliant senses that flood our minds and bodies every moment with overwhelming quantities of information. There is always so much more to perceive than we know how to handle, even when we give what we believe is our greatest attention to the moment. And the more pain or grief or fear we are holding at the time, the more inclined we are to interpret the events around us out of our oldest, least examined images and beliefs. We rely on our most familiar ideas and patterns to shrink our awareness, so that our minds recognize – from that overwhelming flood – only a tiny fraction of what we have actually seen or heard or felt or remembered.

When *Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures*, he began to open their minds to new perspectives. His storytelling inspired them to perceive information they had discarded in their haste to numb their pain and narrow down that flood of information from their senses. By the last Act of this Easter evening story, when *their hearts were burning* as they scrambled back to their friends in Jerusalem, they had begun to learn from Jesus new perspectives for understanding *in* this world, but not *of* it. They were learning Resurrection perspectives. (And when they got back to Jerusalem, they would find that some of the others had been having mind-expanding experiences, too.)

But here, on the road to Emmaus, they do just as we do when we are walking that road of *But we had hoped*. They report their story for the stranger as *they* have witnessed it, just as we do when we believe that the worst has happened and we are helpless before it.

They had started out for Emmaus just to get away from it all, away from the scenes of all the sickening memories, away from the weird stories of the women who had gone to the tomb, away from the whole inconsolable company. They were all so bewildered and full of pain; and they couldn't shut those silly women up, with their fanatical visions of angels and mad, impossible messages: *He is not here. He is risen*. Nothing made any sense anymore. Nothing. Except to tell this stranger the whole, miserable story again; because, so far, no matter how many times they went over it, they didn't know what to make of it.

But the stranger *did* know what to make of it. *He* didn't hear the story the way it sounded to them at all. He did have a very strong reaction; but his reaction was about them, not their story. He called them *foolish and slow of heart*. He said, in fact, *you have not been seeing and hearing these things as they are; you have been seeing and hearing things as you are*.

Doesn't any of this remind you of anything you have heard before, he asked them, *maybe from the prophets?* But he saw that they were stuck in the death of their hope and the wounds of their love. So that is where he began, right where he always begins – with the death of our hope, and the wounds we don't know what to make of: *Was it not*

necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? Wasn't God's Messiah meant to suffer? How can you redeem what isn't really yours?

*Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he re-told their story as they drew near to Emmaus. How different it sounded! How different it felt – so clear and true - and it made their wounded hearts begin to pound. It *wasn't* that they had been foolish to look for a kingdom. It was only what they *hadn't* seen: that the Kingdom's beginning was a suffering Messiah.*

By the time they reached the inn and he began to walk ahead as if he were going on, the two of them responded with another of those so human lines we have known since however old we were when we first heard this story: Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over. Please! Oh please, stay with us... Won't you tell us one more story before "turning out the light?" Please, oh please, stay... the day is nearly over...

They were getting closer and closer to recognizing the meaning of it all, and Jesus would not leave their table that evening until they did. They recognized the *he* was all the meaning. He was the Resurrection. He was the hope they thought they had lost.

And how about us? How about our *But we had hoped* story? Are we getting closer and closer to recognizing the meaning of it all? Jesus will not leave our table, either, until we do.