

From Our Home to Theirs – Emmaus  
Luke 24:13-35  
Rev. Pen Peery  
First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC  
October 30, 2016

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them said, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As he came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is not nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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71 years is a long time to wait to see a team win a baseball game.

When he was 14 years old, Fred McNally – a kid from the Chicago suburbs – snuck into Wrigley Field to watch the Cubs lose game seven on the 1945 World Series to the Detroit Tigers.

In an interview of Mr. McNally that was taped before the Cubs won this year's National League pennant, he was asked if he thought the Cubs would win a World Series game in Wrigley, "No, I gave up on that a long time ago. But if they did, it would be like going to heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Friday night, at the age of 85, Fred McNally got the chance to see the Cubbies play a World Series game again. It was a pitchers' duel – but the Cubs lost 1-0. To my knowledge, Mr. McNally was not interviewed after the game – but from what my friends who live in Chicago tell me – he was probably not the only Cubs fan who suffered a crushing disappointment on the way out of the stadium.

To quote a character in one of my favorite movies, "Hope is a dangerous thing."

Or, as John Cleese said, "I can take the despair, it's the hope I can't take."<sup>2</sup>

And we've felt it, right?

We've dared to believe that we were going to get the promotion. We risked ourselves in the hopes that we could repair the relationship. We convinced our loved ones that there was no way we would fall back into addiction. We've combed through the scans and labs and pathology reports in the hope that remission would continue.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abc10.com/news/cubs-fan-remembers-1945-world-series/341752670>

<sup>2</sup> Cleese, John, *Clockwise*, with thanks to Rev. Becca Gillespie Messman (see below)

“But we had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel...”  
Cleopas and the other disciple were on the road from Jerusalem. The text tells us that they were on their way to Emmaus. Scholars aren’t really sure where a town called Emmaus existed. In fact, some scholars doubt if it existed at all. A good friend of mine supposes that Emmaus may just be the name the Bible uses for “anywhere *but* Jerusalem.” Emmaus is where you go when you have nowhere else to go.<sup>3</sup>

We don’t know a whole lot about Cleopas and his travel companion. It seems they were disciples. Not the original 12 – but folks who had followed Jesus for some time. They knew what Jesus had promised: abundant life, justice, forgiveness of sins, a vision of God’s kingdom. They had committed their lives to those promises. Reordered their priorities. Trusted in them. And then Jesus was crucified and they laid him in a tomb.

They let themselves believe. And now they were on the road to Emmaus, or nowhere in particular, because they just had to get away from the place where their dreams had died.

“But we had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel...”

I have a secret for you: It doesn’t matter if you have been a part of the church for 10 minutes or 100 years, at some point in your Christian journey you are going to express the same kind of disappointment.

That’s kind of part of the deal, believe it or not.

It’s the dynamic tension that exists when you commit your life to follow a Prince of Peace in world of conflict.

It’s the space between the promise of justice and the reality of inequality.

It’s the gap between “on earth as it is in heaven.”

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<sup>3</sup> Rev. Becca Gillespie Messman, co-pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Herndon, VA.

Being a follower of Jesus the Christ guarantees that you will be disappointed – and probably impatient – and certainly frustrated...because we worship a God who is still at work in the world.  
Still creating.  
Still redeeming.  
Still reconciling.  
Still healing.

And that means there are some things that still need work!

It's like being in love. There's not a way to give your heart away without the risk of getting hurt.

You know by now – or you should – that today is our Stewardship Commitment Sunday. Our goal in asking for your financial commitment to support the church's ministry is to increase the number of dollars we give away in mission. Those mission dollars will help us be a better advocate with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, particularly in an effort to recruit or retain great teachers at Westerly Hills Academy, our partner school. They will help provide more affordable housing for families who are in danger of falling into homelessness. They will support our mission partners in Mexico, Haiti, and Cuba. They will help us feed members of our community through Friendship Trays.

But our dollars won't fix all of that. There will still be things that need work. There will still be problems that require something more important (and more difficult to raise) than money – namely community and political will. There will still be hurricanes that make the need even more acute. There will still be steep climb in light of demographic trends.

And because we are putting more of our heart into these efforts, there is a greater likelihood that we will be disappointed.

That's a hard lesson I have learned from my friends who have made it their life's work to seek after social justice: passion can lead to pain, dedication can lead to disappointment, commitment can lead to cynicism.

But what is the point in having a heart if we don't risk giving it away?

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As they were on the road, beginning to build up the walls around their broken hearts, a stranger appeared and asked what they were talking about. They were talking about Jesus, who they had hoped would be the one to redeem Israel...

There really are two ways to look at hope when it seems as if it is lost: You can either give into the despair, grieve over what you know will no longer happen, and consign yourself to a predictable future.

Or, you can let the things you hoped for continue to define the world in which you live.

I think Cleopus and his traveling companion were teetering right there between those two options. They were on the road, in between Jerusalem and Emmaus. A road between hope and despair. A road between a promise they had dared to believe and a future devoid of that promise.

You can't follow Jesus without walking down that road. It's kind of part of the deal.

Indeed, it's on that road that we tend to meet Jesus.

What tipped the scales toward hope for Cleopus and his travel companion, was by offering hospitality to that stranger – inviting him to stay with them and eat. As they sat down with one another, that stranger took bread, blessed it, and broke it...and they recognized him.

For us it is about mission trips and tutoring; it's about being a host for Room in the Inn and learning a new skill on the job site at Habitat for Humanity. It's about joining the conversation about race and economic opportunity, and making sure that your kids experience a world that is bigger than their family, school, or church.

Brian Stevenson calls that proximity...getting to see, in a personal way, what injustice and inequality look like...what the barriers to hope look like.<sup>4</sup> He believes it is the first step toward the kind of future that Jesus promised when he talked about the Kingdom of God.

It's also called faith – a faith that is willing to meet Jesus on the road – in the face of a stranger – in the presence of a mission partner – in the incremental work of seeking change.

You know what hope looks like?

It looks like a 78 year old carrying a wheelbarrow full of concrete in Mexico. It looks like a four-year old filling a bag with rice at Stop Hunger Now event in the Fellowship Hall. It looks like a sanctuary filled with black and white people to learn about strategies to pursue affordable housing. It looks like you living into your call as a disciple of Jesus Christ in the ways you treat the people you meet at school, at work, and on the street.

Oh, it's risky.

It might even lead to disappointment.

It has the potential to bruise your heart.

But there's no better way to invest your money, your time, your energy, or your life than in pursuit of the promise that God gives us through a resurrected Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, Brian, *Just Mercy*