

Luke 24:13-35

Opening eyes and believing

There's a story about a young lad coming home from Sunday School one day. His mom asked him what he had learned that day. With great enthusiasm, the lad reported, "We learned all about this guy Moses."

"And what did you learn?" asked his mom. "We learned that Moses was this guy who was sent by God to get a bunch of people free of the people who had made them slaves and stuff. Moses had all kinds of trouble. But, he went after the bad king and his people with tanks and aircraft and bombs and rockets, and finally the bad king let everybody get away. Then, as soon as they thought they had gotten free, the bad king started to chase Moses and his people and they got trapped between the bad king's army and this huge sea. So Moses got everybody working like crazy and they built this great big expansion bridge, and just in time, they all got across the bridge. Then they burned it so the bad guys couldn't catch them."

The lad's mom looked at him quizzically. "Are you sure that's what your Sunday School teacher told you happened?" "Well, not quite," the boy answered. "But if I told you what he told us, you'd never believe it!!"

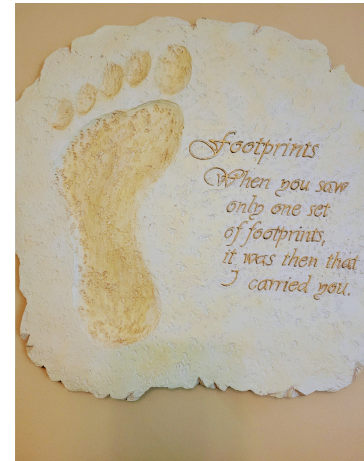
Some stories are almost too good to be true. Sometimes, even when we see something for ourselves, we can hardly believe it is true. In fact, sometimes we fail to see something, even when it is staring us in the face.

That seems to be what is happening on the road to Emmaus, almost 2000 years ago. Here is a story about people who "had hoped", which means that their hope is now dead. All the shutters have been shut; the shades, pulled; the lamps of hope, extinguished; the meaning of their devotion to Jesus, shattered. "The one who was crucified was to have redeemed Israel!" they said. Now, everything is gone. There is nothing left to do but go for a walk.

This is the emotional heart of the Emmaus story – dashed hopes, "if only's." Indeed, the disciples are caught up in the "if only" syndrome. "If only Jesus had gone away from Jerusalem at the threatening hour of his betrayal and arrest. If only basic Roman justice had prevailed in the face of the mob's shouting for his blood. If only Judas had not betrayed the Master. If only Peter's defiance with the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane had sparked an immediate insurrection and Jesus had been saved at the last minute. If only the women had not gone to the tomb, and come back with the disturbing report of its being empty."

Some theologians say that it was the "if only's" that keep the disciples from recognizing Jesus. They are so caught up in what they have lost, in what might have been, in the way they needed and expected things to turn out, that they can not "see" what God is doing in their lives.

The Emmaus Road story is our story. Who among us has not stored up great hopes for the future, but then come to a point where everything about those hopes came crashing down? We have endless ways of framing the "if only" sentences, the "if only" laments. We've all been there, even though our circumstances may differ widely. As with the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, all of these "if only" thoughts, if left to dominate our minds and souls, keep Jesus a stranger to us. And the future God has planned for us seems to be an unlikely scenario. Behind



them all lies one common denominator – the erroneous idea that God is helpless with our folly and will do nothing in the face of our sin.

However, it is because of the "stranger" on the Emmaus Road that we no longer need to live on the brink of despair, no longer need to remain a captive of the forever backward, "if only" approach to life.

Our Lord Jesus Christ brings forgiveness of sins here and now. He brings hope of which we have never dared to dream. He gave himself and is risen for us, and calls us to let go of what is past and to be open to the new thing he can do in our lives today. We sometimes walk through stretches of our lives, on one side of Emmaus, when the dominant force that shapes us is the fact that events of the past, relationships and dreams have turned out differently from what we had hoped. But, our calling is to keep on trusting the "stranger", even when we can't discern his holy presence by the way things are turning out at the moment. Our eyes will not be kept blind permanently. As we live with him and with his people, we will keep getting our eyes opened. "Though we do not see him now, we rejoice in him and believe in him" (1 Peter 1:8).

In Acts 2:39: Peter says "The promise is for you and for your children and all who are far away." It is not just limited to me and my tight little circle. Thus, I don't even have to see it all for it to be true. That is hope through which I can face today with my eyes and heart wide open, expectant and filled with joy.

I'll close with the words of a hymn that were inspired by the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It was written by noted hymn writer Walter Farquharson. Walter talks about how this hymn accompanied him and his family through the last days that his mother lived.

"Stay with us through the night Stay with us through the grief
Stay with us Blessed Stranger Till the morning brings relief.

"Stay with us through the night Stay with us through the pain
Stay with us Blessed Stranger Till the morning breaks again.

"Stay with us through the night Stay with us through the dread
Stay with us Blessed Stranger Till the morning breaks new bread."