

Hope to Carry On

Luke 24:13-35

Our lesson this morning is perhaps one of the most compelling narratives in scripture. I find this scene so fascinating. It's a story well known and much loved—the story of two disciples walking down a dusty road to the village of Emmaus, the evening of that first Easter day.

They talk about the crucified, dead Jesus. Their words come out slowly. There is pain in what they say and how they say it. They trudge along, their feet heavy, their hearts broken.

"I can hardly believe it," one of them says. "In fact, I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. He is dead. He is really gone." "What should we do now?" the other asks. "Life seems hopeless."

And just then a stranger joins them — perhaps he has come up from behind, unknown to them. Perhaps he has walked along with them for a while without their noticing. But suddenly he is there. "I'm sorry," he says, "but I couldn't help but overhear you. What are you talking about?"

They stop and turn to him. Other travelers step around them, anxious to reach their destination before night falls. The three of them stand there in the middle of the dusty road and talk. "Where have you been the last few days," one of the disciples asks the stranger. "How is it you haven't heard anything about Jesus of Nazareth?"

And so the two of them tell the stranger what they know. Listen to what they say from chapter 24 of the gospel of Luke.

He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he would be the one who would redeem Israel. And what's more, it's the third day since all this took place.

Some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they'd seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see him. — (Luke 24:19c-24).

This story has always fascinated me — this scene between two beloved disciples, filled with sadness and despair, grieving at the death of a friend, telling a stranger how the last nail has been driven into their hope for the future.

And our Savior himself, unknown to them, patiently listening, his nail-scarred hands undoubtedly buried deep within his robe to keep them from recognizing him. As he heard those words of grief and sadness, I wonder if his heart ached because of their pain.

Do you hear what they're saying? Can you understand what's happening? There's a message for us to hear today. Listen again to what they say: "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; and *we had hoped* that he would be the one who would redeem Israel."

"We had hoped," they said. They might as well have said, "We had hoped, but not anymore." Because that's the way they felt. He was dead. He was gone. He had died a cruel death on the cross, and it was now over.

For those without a resurrection faith, who have not yet heard the good news of the Gospel, who do not believe the promise of Easter, death is a terrible thing. The punctuation mark of death is a period, ending their hope of any future. Building an eternal barrier between loved ones and themselves.

Without a resurrection faith or living hope, they trudge their way along the dusty, dark roads of life, dragging their feet, wondering what else there is to life. But it need not be that way.

Because as children of God, as those who know the rest of the story, as those who have been to the empty tomb and have met the risen Christ, we know that death is not the end. We know that there is an eternal hope that's ours through faith in the living Christ.

Ours is a living hope, a living trust in God, a faith in a risen Savior regarding the very nature of life and death itself. Our faith rests on a relationship with the crucified and living Lord who says, "I am the resurrection and the life; if anyone believes in me, even though he dies yet shall he live."

That's why Peter could say, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Our hope comes from God and resides in Jesus Christ who died for our sins and won the victory over sin and death when God the Father raised him from the dead. This risen Savior alone can say, "I died and behold I am forevermore; I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die."

The story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus is the story of faith reborn. It is the record of hope restored. That's what makes it one of the greatest stories ever told. It reminds us that we have a pledge and a promise from God, a word of hope, a living trust in our risen Savior that we can hang on to.

Young Helen Keller was a prisoner of her own circumstances. She could not see or hear. She could feel with her hands, but without sight or hearing, how could she know what she was feeling? One day her teacher, Anne Sullivan, took Helen down the familiar path in front of her house to an old hand-pump well. Someone was there drawing water.

Anne took Helen's hand and held it under the water and in sign language spelled on her other hand the letters — W-A-T-E-R. And suddenly, Keller's life changed. With just five letters and the splashing of water from a pump, Keller understood and had a name for what she felt on her hand. And if that experience had a name, she reasoned, others must also. And the world around her exploded.

Just as Helen Keller's life was changed, just as a whole new world opened itself to her, when Jesus walked with the two disciples and revealed himself to them, their lives were never the same. Such is the nature of faith. Such is our resurrection hope. Because he lives, we live too — and he will walk and guide and comfort us through life.

In 1847, a Dr. James Simpson in Edinburgh, Scotland made an amazing discovery — chloroform. And with the discovery the pain of surgery began to become a thing of the past.

As significant as that discovery was, Simpson states that "My greatest discovery, which I made one Christmas Day, [is] that Christ is able to save to the uttermost any man who implicitly trusts Him."¹

And he meant it — not just out of a sense of humility — but he meant it from personal experience. Because Dr. Simpson and his wife had a little girl — a child they dearly loved who one day became ill and all the medicine in her father's black bag could not help her. And she died. They buried her in a cemetery in Edinburgh.

A few months later, they placed a stone at her gravesite and on the stone they inscribed her name "Faith Simpson." And below the name and the dates of her short life were inscribed the words, "Thank God for faith — Faith Simpson and faith in God."

The poet writes:

The stars shine down upon the earth; And the stars shine upon the sea.

The stars look up to a mighty God; The stars look down on me.

The stars will shine for a million years, A million years and a day.

But because of Christ, I live and love Even when the stars pass away.

Such is the hope that is ours in the resurrection of Christ; such is the trust we have in God; and such is the faith that we live with — a faith, hope, and trust that those two disciples discovered on the Road to Emmaus that day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

¹ <http://thisdaywithfwboreham.blogspot.com/2006/04/6-may-boreham-on-james-simpson.html>