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Luke 24:13-35
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The Road to Emmaus

I remember being a senior in high school—like Olivia—feeling like the world was wide open. Like anything was possible. I love that stage of life. There's something beautiful about the expansiveness of those dreams. You look out at the future and think, *Why not? Why couldn't I do something great? Why couldn't I go anywhere, become anything?*

And honestly, part of that is how God wires us. There's something sacred about that sense of calling and possibility. It pushes us forward. It helps us step into new seasons.

But if we're honest... part of it is also the naiveté of youth.

Because at some point, life has a way of interrupting the script we've written. When what we *hoped* would happen... doesn't. And we're left trying to reconcile the gap between the life we imagined and the life we're actually living.

I know for me, life turned out very differently than I imagined back then. My vision was so limited. I thought success meant making a lot of money and traveling the world. That was the dream.

But now, looking back over the landscape of my life, I can see something I couldn't see then: God had so much more in store than I could have ever imagined. Not always easier. Not always what I would have chosen. But deeper. Richer. More meaningful.

And that tension—that gap between expectation and reality—is exactly where we find two disciples in our Scripture today.

This story comes from Luke 24, and it happens on the very same day as the resurrection. Two followers of Jesus are walking from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles away.

Seven miles... that's a long walk. Plenty of time to think. Plenty of time to process. Plenty of time to wrestle with disappointment. Because everything they had hoped for... had just fallen apart.

Please join me as we read from Luke 24:13-35 and hear the story for ourselves.

13 That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village called Emmaus. It was about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15** As they talked about those things, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. **16** But God kept them from recognizing him.

17 Jesus asked them, “What are you talking about as you walk along?”

They stood still, and their faces were sad. **18** One of them was named Cleopas. He said to Jesus, “Are you the only person visiting Jerusalem who doesn’t know? Don’t you know about the things that have happened there in the last few days?”

19 “What things?” Jesus asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet. He was powerful in what he said and did in the sight of God and all the people. **20** The chief priests and our rulers handed Jesus over to be sentenced to death. They nailed him to a cross. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to set Israel free. Also, it is the third day since all this happened. **22** Some of our women amazed us too. Early this morning they went to the tomb. **23** But they didn’t find his body. So they came and told us what they had seen. They saw angels, who said Jesus was alive. **24** Then some of our friends went to the tomb. They saw it was empty, just as the women had said. They didn’t see Jesus’ body there.”

25 Jesus said to them, “How foolish you are! How long it takes you to believe all that the prophets said! **26** Didn’t the Messiah have to suffer these things and then receive his glory?” **27** Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures. He began with Moses and all the Prophets.

28 They approached the village where they were going. Jesus kept walking as if he were going farther. **29** But they tried hard to keep him from leaving. They said, “Stay with us. It is nearly evening. The day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

30 He joined them at the table. Then he took bread and gave thanks. He broke it and began to give it to them. **31** Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. But then he disappeared from their sight. **32** They said to each other, “He explained to us what the Scriptures meant. Weren’t we excited as he talked with us on the road?”

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the 11 disciples and those with them. They were all gathered together. **34** They were saying, “It’s true! The Lord has risen! He has appeared to Simon!” **35** Then the two of them told what had happened to them on the way. They told how they had recognized Jesus when he broke the bread.

Let us pray....

This story is very important to our faith and so I want to explore what might have kept these two disciples from recognizing Jesus as such and understanding his true mission. I want consider how the bible encourages us to face disappointments in our own lives. And finally, we’ll wonder what is God saying to us through this text.

The disciples were grieving. They were sad, their faces were down cast. The Greek word to describe them was *skuthropos*. Sullen, gloomy, downcast. They had a mournful disposition.

One disciple was named Cleopas and the other, we gather from verse 34, was Simon. Early church tradition identified Cleopas or Clopas as Jesus' mother or Mary's, brother in law.

They had believed Jesus was the one. The one who would redeem Israel. The one who would make things right. The one who would change everything.

But then... the cross.

And now the tomb is empty—but they don't know what to make of it. Rumors of angels. Stories of resurrection. Confusion. Uncertainty.

And so they walk. And they talk. And they grieve.

And then something remarkable happens.

Jesus comes alongside them... and they don't recognize Him.

Isn't that fascinating?

The very person they're talking about... the very one they're grieving... is walking right next to them—and they don't see Him.

Luke tells us, "their eyes were kept from recognizing Him."

And I think that raises an important question for us:

What keeps us from recognizing Jesus when He's right in front of us?

For these disciples, I think there were a few things at work.

First, there was grief. Luke says their faces were downcast. The word carries the sense of being gloomy, weighed down, heavy-hearted. If you've ever experienced grief, you know what that's like. It's like walking through fog. Everything feels muted. Disoriented. Hard to see clearly. Grief has a way of narrowing our vision. Of pulling us inward. Of making it difficult to recognize what God might be doing around us.

But I don't think grief was the only issue.

Jesus actually names something deeper. He says, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken." In other words, their problem wasn't just emotional—it was theological. They had misunderstood who Jesus was supposed to be.

Listen to how they describe Him: "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed."

A prophet.

Not the Messiah. Not the Savior. Just a prophet. Even Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses believe that.

And then they say these words—words that are full of heartbreak: “But we had hoped...” “We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

Do you hear it?

We had hoped.

That’s the language of disappointment.

That’s the language of something that didn’t turn out the way you thought it would.

The Greek word for hoped is *elipzo*. It means to be actively waiting for God to come through in special way. We trusted. We expected.

We had hoped to get into a certain college.

We had hoped the relationship would last.

We had hoped the diagnosis would be different.

We had hoped the job opportunity would come through.

We had hoped that a certain leader would solve our country’s problems.

We had hoped the stock market would recover.

We had hoped God would show up in a certain way.

A door we were sure God opened...because we hoped for it...suddenly closes.

We had hoped...

And for them, their hope was very specific: they believed Jesus would redeem Israel politically. That He would overthrow their Roman occupiers. Restore their nation. Establish a strong kingdom they could see once again.

But Jesus didn’t come to overthrow Rome. He came to overthrow sin and death. He didn’t come to meet their expectations. He came to exceed them. But because their expectations were too small... they couldn’t recognize what God was actually doing.

And I wonder how often that’s true for us.

How often do we miss God’s presence... because we’re looking for Him to show up in a specific way?

How often do we fail to recognize His work... because it doesn’t match our expectations?

So what does Jesus do?

He doesn’t dismiss them.

He doesn’t shame them.

He walks with them.

He meets them in their confusion. In their disappointment. In their grief.

And then—this is so important—He brings them back to Scripture.

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explains how everything pointed to Him. How his suffering was always part of the plan. How glory would come—but through the cross.

In other words, Jesus reframes their story. He helps them see that what looked like failure... was actually fulfillment. What looked like defeat... was actually victory. What looked like the end... was actually the beginning.

And then, later that evening, they invite Him to stay with them. They sit down at the table. He takes bread. He gives thanks. He breaks it. And suddenly—their eyes are opened.

It's such a powerful image. Because it reminds us that sometimes clarity doesn't come on the road. It comes in the pause. In the stillness. In the moment when we slow down to recognize what God is doing.

How often do we rush through life, asking God for answers, but never creating space to actually see God? It's like trying to notice a sunset while driving 80 miles an hour - you catch a glimpse, but you won't really see it unless you stop.

When these two disciples finally stop and slow down for this shared meal, they see Jesus in their presence. They recognize Him. And then... He disappears.

Which is such a fascinating moment. It's almost as if Jesus is saying: *Now you know how to see Me.*

Not just in the physical sense—but spiritually. You see Me in the Word. You see Me at the table. You see Me in the breaking of bread.

Jesus said, “Wherever two or three of you are gathered in my name, I am there with you.”¹

And immediately, everything changes. Their sorrow turns to joy. Their confusion turns to clarity. Their despair turns to purpose. And they get up—right then, in the dark—and run seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others: “It's true. The Lord has risen.”

So what does this mean for us? Because we all face disappointment. Every one of us. Things don't turn out the way we hoped. Prayers don't get answered the way we expected. Life takes turns we never saw coming. So how do we walk the Emmaus road well?

Here's a few thoughts.

First, acknowledge your disappointment. Don't pretend it's not there. Don't stuff it down. Don't spiritualize it away. These disciples were honest: “We had hoped...” God can handle your honesty. There's no healing without honesty. Bring it to Him. Name it. Pray it. Share it with others.

¹ Matthew 18:20

Second, allow Jesus to walk with you in it. Notice—they didn't go looking for Jesus. He came to them. And the same is true for you. Even when you don't recognize Him... He is there. Walking with you. Listening. Present.

Third, don't isolate yourself from Christian community. No Church is perfect. We are all sinners in need of a savior. But plant yourself among a group of people who you know will be Jesus with skin to you. Too many Christians today are trying to go at life on their own apart from the Body of Christ.

Fourth, let Scripture reshape your expectations. One of the most powerful things Jesus does for these disciples is take them back to God's Word. Because often, our disappointment comes from believing a story that isn't fully true. We think we know what God should do. But Scripture reminds us who God actually is. Faithful. Present. Working—even when we don't see it.

Go back and hear from prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah who encouraged God's people when they too were discouraged, disappointed, and out of hope.

And God said [I haven't forgotten you. When this time of exile is over, I will bring you back from the place I carried you away to...] "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."²

Or "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."³

Or spend time hearing from the Apostle Paul who experienced set back after set back and yet never lost sight of the hope he professed. He even encouraged young Christians in Rome who were being brutally persecuted by the Emperor Nero, saying, "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us."⁴

And finally, trust that God is doing more than you can see. God is still writing your story. It isn't over yet.

² Jeremiah 29:11

³ Isaiah 40:28b-31

⁴ Romans 5:2

I think about a season in my own life—when my past sabbatical got pushed back a year and then canceled. I had all these hopes. Plans for rest, renewal, travel, time with family. And then 2020 happened.

And instead of rest... there was loss.

Instead of renewal... there was grief.

Instead of clarity... there was confusion.

It didn't turn out the way I hoped.

But looking back now, I can see something I couldn't see then. God was still at work. He was shaping something deeper in me. Giving me a new heart for ministry. Teaching me to let go of my plans. Introducing me to new Christian voices and spiritual guides who helped me understand suffering in a new way.

What I thought was lost... God redeemed. Not in the way I expected. But in a way that was ultimately better. And that's the promise we hold onto.

That in all things—*all things*—God is working for the good of those who love Him.⁵

That doesn't mean everything is good. But it does mean that nothing is wasted.

So if you find yourself today on the road to Emmaus...

If you're carrying disappointment...

If you are lamenting that life didn't turn out the way you had dreamed...

If you're saying, "I had hoped..."

Know this: Jesus is closer than you think. He is walking with you—even now. And in time, if you turn to Him, He will open your eyes. And not only will you see more clearly, you'll see His footsteps in the sand behind you where He carried you along the way.

Amen.

⁵ Romans 8:28