

Pastor John Schwehn
Sermon, Easter 3A, 2020
Luke 24:13-35

My friends, grace and peace from our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

First, for those who tuned in last week, you may have noticed that this space behind me is a little more adorned. I asked for some submissions of things to go behind me, here's what I got:

A wooden cross made by Dale Erickson.

A flower painted on a coffee filter by Lydia Schwehn.

Two potted purple flowers from the HVAC mechanics who installed a new furnace in my home this week.

And, finally, a proper doodle by Chris Frost, inspired by the gospel reading we just heard. A burning heart. I'm going to come back to this one in a few minutes.

After the devastating experience of Jesus' crucifixion outside Jerusalem...

After some women returned from the empty tomb to tell the men that Jesus' body was not there...

After fear of what might be coming next was spreading through Jerusalem...

Two grieving, skeptical followers of Jesus do the only thing they can think of to do – the only safe thing they *can* do given the circumstances: they go for a walk.

I don't know about you, but I can certainly relate to these two. These days, just about the only thing we CAN do is go for walks.

We walk to get out of the house.

We walk to reconnect with the earth.

We walk for a breath of something fresh.

We walk to exercise our pets or our children.

And we walk, sometimes, as a way of working through the thoughts that might be racing through our head. We walk as a way to burn away some of the anxiety, some of the fear, some of the unknown about what might be coming.

And these two men in the gospel story are joined by a stranger. We know it's the risen Christ, but they do not. And Jesus asks them a question that they find to be pretty...well...out-of-touch. "What's going on? What are you guys talking about?" he asks.

"Are you the *only one* to not know what happened?" they reply. Because, for these two, they had watched their savior, God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, unjustly imprisoned, tortured and killed in agony and humiliation. It was OBVIOUS to them – it should be OBVIOUS to anyone – what they would have been talking about.

It would be like if a stranger came up to you on one of your long walks these days in order to ask, "What's with everyone wearing the face masks? Why are all the restaurants closed? What happened to the baseball season?"

So, graciously, they tell this "stranger" the whole story. From the beginning. And in the middle of the story, they get to what really was grieving them. They get away from the facts and get to the grief: "We had hoped," they say, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

Hopes unfulfilled. The future we imagined...gone. We had hoped...

How does that sentence end for you today?

We had hoped...

...Schools might reopen before the end of the year.

...To be singing with the sanctuary choir at Carnegie Hall in New York City earlier this week

...To be watching the MN Twins or MN United having their best seasons ever!

...To see our children walk across that commencement stage, diploma in hand.

...To get to see our loved one – to hold our loved one – one more time before they died.

...To go on that trip, take that adventure, close on that house, get that promotion, quit that job, have that wedding, and on and on and on.

We had hoped...

And this stranger, Jesus, he walks and he lets them talk. He more than anyone knows the happy, joyful end of the story... But Jesus doesn't interrupt them. He listens. He walks.

And then the walk ends. And they need a place to stay. And they need some food to eat. Jesus breaks the bread and shares it with them...and it's right then, in *this* moment, that they finally can see – finally can FEEL – the truth that had been hidden this whole time:

The power of death has been defeated, life and love win out over fear, Jesus is raised from the dead, God is with us always.

And then they think back to that walk and they realize, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?” Which brings us to this anatomically correct doodle of a burning heart from our friend, Chris.

Heartburn. Their hearts had been burning all along. And we often preach about those burning hearts as faith, as an inherent trust and knowledge of God's presence all along. And yes, that's one way to look at it.

But I'm still feeling the weight – every day – of those lost hopes. “We had hoped.” And that shock of disappointment, of dreams unfulfilled, of living into a new reality we never asked for or wanted...that makes my heart burn as well.

And maybe the two don't have to be separate. Maybe faith – God's presence, God's redeeming love – can go hand in hand with these deep feelings of disappointment and longing. God is present in longing. This is what we saw on the cross after all – God fully present even in what we fear most: death, suffering, grief.

And then, you see, those burning hearts burn brighter at the table. The fear, the longing, burns away and the hope that they have by faith alone is sitting right in front of them. In their companionship at table, they have a sense for the first time that they *will* get through this.

After all, that word companion is virtually identical to compassion. They come from the same Latin root. Com-pan-ion = one who breaks bread with another. Com-passion = one who suffers with another.

And so, right now, come to Christ's table...whether you are alone in your space or joined alongside family members or dear friends – you are joined by compassionate companions, breaking bread with those who are in this together with you.

And most of all, you are joined there by Jesus Christ, who is really and truly with us...walking with us, listening to us, completely present in our dashed hopes and burning hearts, offering us some shred of hope and joy at this table. Thanks be to God. Amen.