

“LITTLE THINGS WITH BIG MEANING: II – BREAD”  
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Acts 2:43-47

Luke 24:13-35

About five months or so from now, I'll turn 65. For almost all of my nearly 65 years, I've attended church. Many of you know that, along with being a high school music teacher, my father directed church choirs all of his adult life, so being the child of a choir director meant that all of us were in church every single Sunday, unless we were sick or on vacation.

The first time I actually didn't go to church for a while was when I was in college. I think it was the first time I actually realized that you didn't have to go to church. Up until then, it was mandatory because I was living at home. But then, I got to college, and though I attended church some, I didn't more often than I did.

Nevertheless, when I graduated from college and went back home, I went back to church as well, and have never left. And I tell you all of that to tell you that I have heard scriptures and Biblical stories more times than I can count. And I've heard them, as many of you have, so often, that I can tell them by heart, as can you.

You and I can talk about the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan; we can tell about Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, the feeding of the five thousand, and Jesus stilling the storm. I think we are particularly good at remembering the stories around Christmas and Easter.

And that's good, yes, but there's a danger to that familiarity as well. And the danger is that we get into a rut and fail to open ourselves to hear something new. I have to tell you that I know I'm guilty of that, so when I do hear something new, or I hear something in the middle of a scripture lesson that I've heard a million times that suddenly jumps out at me – I love it. And that's what happened to me this week.

You heard the lesson, the story. Mike just read it. We come on this lesson every few years right after Easter – it's the account of what happened to two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are walking down the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus and they are despondent. So much has happened, so much hurt and sadness. They've left Jerusalem and they're walking along and they happen upon a man. It is Jesus, but as the scripture says, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him."

He notices that they are having an obviously deep and serious conversation, and he asks them about it. And so they tell him about what has just happened in Jerusalem. They even are surprised that he doesn't know about it. And so they tell him all that had happened – how Jesus had come among them and done miraculous things, then how people turned against him and he was put to a cruel death on a cross. They told him how some women had claimed to see him alive after he had died and been laid in a tomb. And how some of the disciples had gone there but did not find him. They clearly were perplexed, clearly troubled.

And that's when Jesus spoke again, telling them about prophets and what had been foretold, and how what had happened in Jerusalem had fulfilled those prophecies. Still, they did not know it was Jesus.

The day wears on, and soon it's time for the evening meal, so just as the disciples and their new friend were about to part ways, they invited him to join them for dinner. He accepted their gracious invitation, and when they sat down at the table, Jesus picked up the loaf of bread and broke it – and at that moment, with that action, the eyes of the disciples were opened and they saw Jesus. He was indeed alive as the women had said, and as fast as their legs could carry them, the scripture tells us they hightailed it back to Jerusalem to tell the others!

It is a wonderful, wonderful story, and like I said, all of us have heard it hundreds of times and know it by heart. But in all those hundreds of times, I seem to have skipped over the unbelievable importance of four little words, right in the middle of the text. A pastor whose commentary I read this week led me to see them. Four little words that I think tell so much about the story, and more importantly, for us, right now, they speak so clearly to our world today.

And here are the four words, four words the disciples said as they told their sad tale to him on the road to Emmaus. “But we had hoped . . .”

“But we had hoped.” When they met this stranger and he asked them what was going on, they told him their story about the Messiah and all the wonderful things he had done. They let him know in their words and their countenance how he was changing their lives, indeed, all of life. And then, they said those words, “But we had hoped . . .”

“We had hoped he was the One to redeem Israel. We had hoped he would bring peace. We had hoped he would make all things right. We had hoped the love that he shared and showed would be embraced by the world. We had hoped that his

love would win out and evil would fall away. We had hoped. We had hoped, but . . .”

Here’s why those words struck such a chord with me this week, because I think there are a lot of people these days feeling exactly like those disciples were feeling on the road to Emmaus. There are a lot of people dealing with dashed hopes and dreams. There are a lot of people saying those four words in these days of the coronavirus pandemic. “But we had hoped . . .”

I think of high school seniors and their families. They had hoped for a spring of proms and award ceremonies and most of all, walking across a stage at graduation with their families and friends cheering them on. Now, it’s all up in the air, and it just seems so unfair.

I think of brides and grooms who have planned for months, sometimes years, the wedding of their dreams and now that can’t happen.

I think of people who scrimped and saved for the vacation of a lifetime, and instead of being on a tropical island or at Disney World with their entire families

they're sitting inside their homes and going out only when necessary and only when they're wearing a mask.

I think of new grandparents who, more than anything, want to hold their new grandbaby, but have to settle for Facetime or Skyping. And new, first-time parents who are figuring everything out for themselves, when they thought they'd have a grandmother or grandfather right there with them for the first weeks of their child's life.

I'm going to be selfish and confess that I've uttered these four words more than a few times since this pandemic began. I surely had hoped that my last weeks and months in active ministry would have been different than it's turned out to be. I keep hoping that we'll get to be back together in person before my retirement begins, but who knows?

Then there are those who utter "but we had hoped" from the depths of pain and sorrow, for they are those who had hoped that a loved one would recover from Covid 19, who had hoped that they could have been by their side and held their hand through it all.

And all of those dear, dedicated medical personnel, first responders and essential workers – oh, I know they all hoped that things would be different, that people wouldn't die by the thousands, that their painstaking efforts would have made a difference.

“But we had hoped . . .” – words that spoke to the heart of what those disciples were feeling on the road to Emmaus; words, I think, that speak to so many in these difficult and trying days.

Which is why it is so important to remember the rest of the story – how, when these disappointed and out-of-hope men sat down to eat with their new friend, they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Surely they recalled his words at the Last Supper, “when you break this bread, remember me. When you drink the wine, remember me.” At that moment, they knew their hopes had been realized, he was the One to redeem Israel, he was the One to bring life and love into the world, he was the One who rose from death, he was the One to show that evil never has the final word.

Today friends, we too will be at table with Jesus. Like those disciples, we might have trouble seeing him because of the sadness and sorrow of these days. My prayer is that when we receive the bread and drink the juice, that our eyes will be opened once again, and we will know joy. We will know that the sadness and sorrow will not last forever, that progress will come, a vaccine will be discovered, treatments will improve, and lives will be saved.

Guided by God's grace, we will find ways to celebrate graduations and weddings and births and baptisms, and yes, retirements. We will get back to doing some of our old things, but in new ways, and with a new sense of gratitude for them. And we will see that, though we thoughts are hopes were dashed, God was still at work making a way where we couldn't see it.

I'm so glad that Jesus, the very bread of life, has drawn us together in worship this morning, and that we're able to celebrate Holy Communion with one another, even though we're far apart. May the bread and the juice that we're about to partake, be signs to each of us, of a Savior who is with us always – when our hopes our dashed, when our dreams are fulfilled, and every moment in between.



May this holy meal today fill you with strength and assurance and most of all, peace knowing that Christ is with you, forever and always, and all will yet be well. Thanks be to God!

Amen