

“Hope Renewed”

Luke 24:13-35 & Ecclesiastes 3:11

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Prayer for Understanding Gracious God, please open our eyes to truth hidden in the ordinary. Open our ears, so that in the midst of all the noise of our life, we might hear your word. And open our spirits, so we might recognize you in the common activities: the meals shared, the friendships enjoyed, the leisure time, this day and in the days of Easter ahead. Amen

God is with us. God is love. Love is the most powerful force in the cosmos. Love is eternal. Love brings resurrection from death. Love unites all people across time and space. Love redeems everything and everyone. God's love is relentless.

There are many things that knowing about them only gives us a glimpse of what it is like to experience them. Knowing how to ride a bike only gives us a glimpse of what it is like to experience riding a bike. Knowing that the harness, rope and belayer will catch you when you fall in climbing only gives you snippet of the confidence you receive after you experience the gear safely protecting you. Knowing about Easter, the power of love, gives us a mere glimpse of all God has, is and will do with love.

Jesus told all the disciples that love is stronger than death, that he will rise from the dead, that he will always be with them, that they will be resurrected and enjoy eternal life with God and everyone. They knew this. Then came the chaos of Jesus crucifixion. They grieved the loss of Jesus physical presence. They feared for their lives. Their way of life suddenly changed. They had no idea what was coming tomorrow. Everything was suddenly continually changing. Knowing provides some comfort. Experiences of love transform us. The resurrection encounters reveal God's love comforting grief and returning hope in the midst of devastating loss.

God reveals the power of love in a manner that resonates with each person. For Mary it was the resurrected Jesus calling her by name. For a couple of women, it was an angel. For some disciples it was the resurrected Jesus appearing to them, offering peace and filling them with the Holy Spirit. Thomas needed to physically touch Jesus. Other disciples experienced the power of God's love when they eat a fish breakfast with Jesus. For two disciples it was a walk, conversation and a shared meal. **Luke 24:13-35 NRSV “Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Jesus said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” Jesus asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then Jesus said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has**

appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

These two travelers heard about the resurrected Jesus. They have information yet the facts have not yet transformed them. Their grief was overwhelming. Their hopes seemed to be all gone. They were crushed, discouraged, confused, frustrated. They were afraid, unsure of their future, unsure of the world’s future. They were trying to get back to the way things were a week ago. In the midst of loss and sudden drastic change there is a pull, a desire, for one to go back to normal, to the way things were before.

Two disciples were not sure where they were going. They were running away, and they were hiding and they were going back to what they knew and they were listening to the news and they were talking and they were walking because they had to get out and do something. The resurrected Jesus is walking with them. Grief, despair, fear, worry makes it difficult for us to see Jesus, to see the love, to see the good. Jesus listened. Jesus asked questions. God loves us enough to listen to each of us. After listening for miles, hours, Jesus reminds them of times when God’s love redeemed their ancestor’s lives, times when God’s love resurrected their life. Recalling these experiences of love sparked their love. Up until this point it was all about themselves. What should they do? How will do get through this? How can they comfort their pain? Love inspired them to invite Jesus to dinner. Jesus did something familiar, something he did at every meal with them for the last three years. He took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. It was then that they experienced the resurrected Jesus and the transformational power of God’s love. Their grief was comforted. Their fears calmed. Suddenly they were able to look back and perceive how God’s love was redeeming. In that moment they felt their heart warming, expanding with love. Hope returned to them.

Knowing about God’s love provided a snippet of hope. Experiencing God’s love caused hope to flourish. Barbara Brown Taylor says experiencing the resurrection of Jesus permanently rearranges our understanding of reality. When we merely know about the risen Jesus, we try to squeeze what we are told happened on Easter morning into our understanding of the world and how things work in the world. Once we experience the resurrected Jesus, it is the other way around. How we understand the world fits into the reality of a love more powerful than death, of a love that conquers all. Experiencing resurrection love enables us to more than know that God is redeeming all it enables us to live it. Experiencing resurrection love assures us that our hope will be reality.

Together we are walking into an unsure future abundant with wonderful possibilities. All of us are grieving. Coronavirus has changed the world. It has changed each of us as a person. Sometimes grief makes us sad, sometimes fearful, sometimes angry, sometimes guilty, sometimes blaming, sometimes disillusionment. Everyone in the world is grieving the loss of something and most are grieving the loss of many things and beloved people. There is no going back to the way things were before coronavirus. Name your losses. Write them down, share them with someone, share them with God. It is ok to be angry with God and to pour out your anger to God in prayer. Jesus continually invites us to pour out our hearts, to unashamedly share exactly how we feel. Name even the losses that seem trivia. Every loss will need to be grieved. Everyone grieves uniquely and at a different speed. Grief often comes in waves. Find ways to lament, to passionately express your sorrow and grief. If you need help read Lamentations or one of the 42 individual psalms of lament or 16 community psalms of lament.

Martin Luther treasured the psalms of lament. Martin said, “What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid the storm winds of every kind? . . . Where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. . . . When they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for your fear or hope. And that they speak these words to God and with God, this I repeat, is the best thing of all. This gives the words double earnestness and life”

Perhaps a long walk with a friend and God will help you grieve. God is listening. Grief is a journey. Work to let go of comparisons and let come the good in your new reality. Work to shift your attention from what you cannot control to what you can control, to shift from framing things negatively to positively. Be gracious with yourself. When you get stuck seek help. Talk to your counselor. Grief is exhausting work. Be gracious with others. All of us are fatigued.

Psalms are prayers that have been prayed for generations. Most of them take us on a journey. They begin with lament, grief, venting about what is wrong about life. God listens. God places within our mind memories of ways God’s love has made life wonderful in the past. God fills us with hope. Often the psalms are prayed with others so we can listen to one another, share how God’s love made a difference in our life in the past and expand our hope, dreaming of the wonders love will do in the future and for eternity.

We can learn from the past. We can pivot to new ways of loving, rejoicing and celebrating. Next Sunday we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The words livestreamed as the bread is broken and the juice is poured will be

familiar. The Holy Spirit uniting us all in love, nourishing us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation will be familiar. You partaking of some sort of food and beverage in your home will be new. God will comfort your grief, expand your love and invigorate your hope. We prove resurrection by resolving to live as though resurrection is true and subsequently learning from experience that indeed resurrection is true. We know Easter yet we are just beginning to perceive the glorious resurrection of all.

As we debate, discuss and question the current events, pressing needs and confusing circumstances of our time, Jesus is with us. Listen for goodness, life-giving power, abundant grace, comforting kindness, steadfast peace and jubilant joy. Feel your heart expand with love as you celebrate the good news of Jesus. With gratitude we partner with God in resurrecting the cosmos.

On our own Emmaus journey, our God yearns to touch our hearts with surprise, wonder, puzzlement, the beauty of deep memories, a burning heart and ecstatic joy. We walk the roads of our lives always in the company of the Holy Spirit inspiring us to share the glorious Easter joy with everyone. Rowan Williams says. “When we celebrate Easter we are really standing in the middle of a second ‘Big Bang,’ a tumultuous surge of divine energy as fiery and intense as the very beginning of the universe.”

The book of Ecclesiastes talks about seasons, how life can seem meaningless, the future unclear. Then Ecclesiastes declares. **Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT “God has made everything beautiful for its own time. God has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.”**

William Frey, a retired Episcopal bishop, recalls how he volunteered to read to an older student named John, who was blind. One day, William said, I just had to ask him, “How did you lose your eyesight?” “A chemical explosion,” John answered, “at the age of thirteen.” Still curious, William asked John, “How did that make you feel?” John responded, with brutal honesty, “Life felt like it was over for me, I felt helpless and I hated God with all my heart. For the first six months, I did nothing but stay in my room and I ate all my meals alone, by my choice. Then a curious thing happened. One day my father entered my room and said, ‘John, winter’s coming and the storm windows need to be up. That is your job. I want those hung by the time I get back this evening or else.’” Then John’s father turned and walked out of the room and slammed the door. John reported that he was so angry that he was thinking, “Who does he think he is? Who does he think I am? I’m blind.” He was so furious, he decided to do it. “I’ll show them. I’m gonna try to do it and I’m gonna be not only blind, but I’m gonna be paralyzed, ’cause I’m gonna fall. I’ll get them.” He felt his way to the garage and found the windows and located the necessary tools. He found the ladder, and all the while he was muttering under his breath, “I’ll show them. I’ll fall, and they will have a blind and paralyzed son. That will be great payback.” Eventually, he did complete the assignment. John did get the windows up before evening. But the assignment achieved more than that. It achieved the father’s goal as well. John reported that it was at that point that he slowly realized that he could still work and even more so that he could begin to reconstruct his life. As John continued to tell William his story, John’s eyes, his blind eyes began to mist. “Seven years later, I learned that something else important had happened that day, that the entire day my father was no more than three feet from me.”

Each of us are grieving our losses. God is with us. God’s love is resurrecting. Amen