

From Grief to Joy
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 53; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 24:13-36

Our final Scripture reading today is from Luke 24:13-36. Listen now to God's perfect, holy, and magnificent Word. "Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "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 was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, 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 had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

- As we continue on into our shelter-in-place journey, confusion reigns supreme
 - What day is it? What time is it?
 - Weekends sort of lose their meaning
 - Spring break is foggy because there's no set schedule
 - What delivery is coming when? What groceries will I have to make dinner with tonight?
 - Confusion about who has the right information about the virus, if anyone has it
 - Confusion about what 6 feet is
- Easter this year may feel off and confused
 - Is it Easter without buffet dinners and new dresses?
 - Is it Easter without Easter egg hunts?
 - Is it Easter in the church without communion?
- The first Easter was not a celebration but repeated unexpected confusion
 - The women went to the tomb to embalm Jesus – first day able
 - The tomb is open and Jesus is not there
 - The biblical accounts show the core confusion
 - Matthew – Mary Magdalene and another Mary go to the tomb, see an angel, are told to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee, and they see Jesus on the way – the disciples do eventually travel to Galilee for more time with Jesus
 - Mark – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome go to the tomb – they see one angel and leave terrified
 - Luke – multiple women – two angels – report to the disciples, who do not believe – Peter runs to the tomb to find it empty – two disciples walk to Emmaus and see Jesus, they run back and tell the other disciples and confirm that Peter too has seen Jesus, and then Jesus appears in the upper room to them – He teaches them over a forty-day span, and then ascends to heaven
 - John – Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb (no other women mentioned) and Jesus is not there – no angels are mentioned – goes to tell the disciples, Peter and John run to the tomb, John arrives first but Peter actually goes in first, then John – they go back home, but Mary stays weeping and sees two angels – then she sees Jesus, thinking He is the gardener until He lets her see the truth – she tells the disciples, and then Jesus appears to them in the upper room – Thomas sees Him in the upper room a week later – later on, Jesus comes to the disciples while they are fishing and restores Peter

- What does all this confusion in the Bible about the resurrection accounts mean?
 - It means that no one was trying to get the story straight – no one was behind the scenes making sure everyone was telling the same story
 - They give one angle on the story, but not the whole account; they aren't contradictory but complementary
 - If you told someone where we were broadcasting from this morning, you'd say the Huff's living room, and you'd be right – you could describe the mantle, the artwork from Birch and Arrow, all be correct
 - Someone in the room might not mention any of that at all – they might mention Catha's teaching corner, the puzzle in the corner, the couch, the game table, the bookshelves – and they would be right too
 - If we think about it logically, it means that it's extremely believable – and what all four gospels are absolutely convinced of is this: Jesus did not stay dead in the tomb but was resurrected
- When we look at today's central passage, we see the same underlying themes of confusion and hope
 - Cleopas and his friend are traveling to Emmaus
 - Their attitude is downcast; when Jesus comes to walk with them, they are not hopeful
 - They had been hopeful that Jesus was going to restore Israel
 - Instead, He had handed over by the authorities and crucified
 - Here's the funny part – they knew about the women at the tomb – they knew about the angels – they knew about Peter and John going to find the tomb empty – yet they were downcast and confused and concerned – the empty tomb meant nothing to them yet except bewilderment
 - Jesus chastises them a bit – and He uses a phrase we have almost never heard – “slow of heart” – only place in Scripture – not very pastoral, but dumb sheep have to be prodded pretty hard to go in the right direction – a shepherd doesn't carry a big stick for nothing
 - Jesus explains everything to them from the Scriptures they are missing
 - Finally, they invite Him to dinner, they sit down, Jesus breaks the bread and blesses and gives it to them – they recognize Him, and He disappears
 - “Were not our hearts burning within us on the road as He talked to us and opened the Scriptures to us?”
 - This puts them back in Jerusalem probably around 8pm-9pm at the earliest – it's late – the disciples are still trying to make sense of it all
 - They bring the disciples hope – and then Jesus appears

- From out of grief comes joy; from out of sorrow comes hope
 - Within two months, through Jesus' teaching and the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples start spreading the word of Jesus' resurrection and the power He has over death, giving us eternal life and changing us into new people
 - This news changes the world, and quickly – within a generation, it has reached the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire and started to spread out into the rest of the known world
 - Christ's resurrection changes everything about everything – it changes everything we know about the world and how it operates and how we are to live – His promise of new and eternal life for those who believe changes our outlook, changes how we treat others, how we care for others, how we view society
- Today, we are living in a time of confusion that all our technology and interconnectedness can't fix
 - We are more confused today than perhaps we've ever been – we aren't sure what's moral and immoral, ethical and unethical, funny or offensive – we know so much but we understand so little – we can't agree if the checks the government is about to send us is good or bad, a needed boost or a loan against the future of our children and grandchildren – everything is up in the air
 - But when Jesus rose from the dead, out of confusion came clarity
 - Clarity of our purpose – in our time on Earth, we are to become like God in our character
 - Clarity of our redemption – we are saved from our sins through God's son who gave Himself up for our salvation
 - Clarity of our future – all who believe in Christ, trust in Him, and follow Him will not have perfect or even pleasant earthly lives, but an eternity spent in the presence of God as His adopted sons and daughters
 - Clarity of our hope – not in our own goodness or good deeds, but in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- This Easter Sunday, what do we need to know?
 - God made you for Himself and, if you trust and believe in Christ, He has redeemed your life through Christ Jesus, who has erased the sin debt we owe due to our disobedience
 - Now is always the right time to pursue Him, to come out of the darkness, fog, and haze of confusion and into the light of Christ – you will still encounter confusion, but you'll know who has the answers
 - Easter is the beginning of the Christian life, not the end – coming to Him as your Savior, you will also begin to follow Him as Lord