

How could it come to this? Hopes that were once sky-high have now hit rock bottom. What an unbelievable time to be living in!

Sounds a lot like us doesn't it? Welcome to Planet Earth 2020. At the beginning of the year, things were so positive! The economy was roaring. Unemployment was at a 50-year low. Best of all, the Minnesota Twins were predicted to have another great season! 😊 But now, due to the worldwide pandemic, that's all changed. Unemployment has skyrocketed. All schools in Minnesota are distance learning for the remainder of the academic year. Celebrations like Confirmation Sunday, which was supposed to be today here at First Lutheran, graduations, parties, family get-togethers are all on hold. What a turbulent, frantic year it's been so far! Who could ever have imagined all this? How our whole way of looking at life and the world has changed!

But actually, when I described how those sky-high hopes are now at deep-sea level depths of despair, I was really describing the mindset of two of Jesus' followers walking on the road to Emmaus on Easter afternoon as told in our Gospel reading. There is a lot we can learn from them.

What a frantic, turbulent week it had been for these two men. As these disciples of our Lord trudged along that afternoon their faces were downcast; they had so much to sort through. As they made the seven-mile journey back home to Emmaus, they were leaving behind the city where the tumultuous events had all taken place. The place that had changed their whole way of looking at life and the world!

Their week began with such promise; with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem! But the week ended in tragedy with His horrible death. The shouts from the crowds of 'Hosanna' on Sunday turned into shouts of 'Crucify!' on Friday. And now these two shell-shocked disciples of Jesus are wearily making their way home. Along the way they talk with each other about all that had taken place.

That's when a very curious thing happened. They were joined on their journey by a third man who doesn't seem to have a clue about current events, events that *everyone* was talking about. The Stranger asks them about their conversation, and one of them, named Cleopas, replies, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" When the Stranger asks, "What things?", they continue, probably unable to comprehend how anyone could possibly *not* know "what things"?

"Concerning Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "A man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief

priests and rulers delivered Him up 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 happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find His body, they came back saying that they had even 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 Him they did not see.”

That sums up the whole week. That should bring the Stranger up to speed and help Him to get the picture. **Now** He’ll understand their grief.

But if it’s sympathy they’re looking for, the Man’s response must have come as quite a shock: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” And then, for the rest of the seven-mile trek to Emmaus, He runs them through the Old Testament, demonstrating time and time again that all of this was God’s plan of salvation. Everything had gone exactly according to plan.

The trio arrives at the village, and it appears as though the Stranger is going to keep heading down the road, so Cleopas and his friend urge Him to stay. He agrees, and they sit down to eat; and there, it’s the **Guest** who-contrary to custom- takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to **them**.

It’s then that they finally recognize Who it has been all along. It’s their risen Lord Jesus! And then He vanishes from their sight! Completely amazed, they exclaim, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?” And then they hurry back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples they have seen Jesus risen from the dead. The disciples report a sighting, too. Now that the risen Lord’s completed His work of conquering sin, death and grave, Jesus seeks out His people. He gathers them in and gives them His peace. This will be a pattern for things to come.

But let’s back up a moment. Go back to Jesus’ rebuke along the road: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” That sounds harsh, but Jesus speaks these words in love. The grief and the despair that the two men feel from the crucifixion is real and crushing, but those emotions have become a terrible barrier. For these men, their emotions have become more real than the Lord’s sure and certain Word and promises. Their emotions of disappointment have slowed their hearts and made them foolish. **How** foolish? So much so that they don’t recognize their risen Savior, even when He’s walking right beside them and talking with them on the road!

If it weren't for Jesus' patience and faithfulness, they would have continued in their grief, believing that Jesus was **not** the Savior and that He **hadn't** been raised from the dead. What's more, they would have continued in unbelief, and been lost.

Jesus' rebuke sounds severe, but He's warning them of a very grave danger. He preaches the Law against their sin of believing their eyes and their gut reactions over His Word.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. From His Word He shows them how the Savior was **supposed** to come and die on the cross for the sins of the world. In other words, He proclaims the Gospel to give them faith. He enters the house with them and feeds them. It's then that their eyes are opened. It's then that they recognize their Lord in the breaking of the bread. It's then that their hope and faith are restored, because the Savior came to them to restore and strengthen their faith. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus reveals the path of life: The Savior was present there with His people, and in His presence is fullness of joy.

Jesus does the same for you today. He comes to abide with you, to stay with you through His Word and His Supper with us. He comes to you to give you the same fullness of joy that He gave to the Emmaus disciples. He comes to restore your hope, just like He restored theirs.

It's sin that wants to rob us of that joy and hope like it tried to rob those very things from the Emmaus disciples. Sin seeks to separate all of us from the Lord of life for eternity. To save us from the power of sin, Jesus became flesh and went to the cross to die in our place, since the just wages of our sin is death. To bring that forgiveness to us personally, He visits us in His Word and His Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. He does this to give us His forgiveness, life, and salvation. That is our comfort and our hope through all the trials and the sicknesses that will come our way in life. This is our comfort that will sustain us through every heartache and disappointment. This is our comfort even when we're facing death. The Lord Who died and is risen will never forsake you, instead He visits you. He forgives your sins and strengthens your faith so that one day He will raise you from the dead, into His glorious presence, forever.

Until then, the Lord visits us on **our** road to Emmaus, that is, on **our** journey through life. He's with us always, no matter our circumstances, no matter our feelings. Through Word and Sacrament, our Savior is with us today just as certainly as He was with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He

comes to calm all **our** fears, to clear up **our** doubts, to cleanse us of **our** sins, and to give **us** the sure and certain hope of eternal life with Him.

So we do not lose hope! Christ is with you during all your frantic, turbulent times in life, as well as during your just “plain, ordinary” times. Through good and bad. His love never changes! He will never leave you, instead He visits you. He forgives all your sins and strengthens your faith so there will never be a reason to lose hope! Amen