

**“But we had hoped.....”** Such sad words. They ring of regret, heartache and the absence of any hope at all. They are spoken by a man who has just endured shocking heartbreak – a man who watched his future disappear when the ONE in whom he had hoped was put to death on a hill called Calvary.

Cleopas was the speaker’s name. He was one of the 72 disciples attached to Jesus’ ministry. He has a nameless companion along with him who was also one of the 72. Why nameless? Scholars suggest the reason was not that Luke did not know the name, but rather that recording the name could have been cause for scandal. They believe his companion is almost certainly his wife. To name but one man out of two would have been rude in the extreme , yet it would be even worse to name a woman as a disciple. Silence seemed the best option. So we can pretty confidently believe that Cleopas and Mrs. Cleopas were returning from Jerusalem heading home together on the road to Emmaus. They had sadly realized that it was all over. It was time to grieve properly for their Lord, Jesus, the One they had followed and served with such love and joy. Picture them downcast, eyes moist with tears, perhaps leaning into each other as much as allowed when suddenly a stranger comes along. He notices their sadness and asks them what has happened. They are brave enough to tell him that Jesus who did many signs and wonders and was approved by God in all things, that this Jesus had been crucified and buried. Imagine the sigh in their words :“We had hoped that He would be the Messiah, the One to redeem Israel.” Almost as an afterthought, they mention that some of the women had claimed to see Him alive just that very morning . Peter, one of the leaders, had gone out to the tomb to check, and found it empty but did not see Him. The disciples were filled with fear and confusion. So they themselves had decided to just go home, call it a day, and give it up. The stranger suggests that they need to rethink things. They are being somewhat dull-witted in fact. And then he starts with the Moses and all the Prophets and tells the stories that teach that the Messiah must suffer and die and be vindicated on the third day. They listen, he is very wise and interesting, and there is comfort in His

company. When they reach home, the stranger makes to keep going, but they prevail on Him to stay for dinner as darkness is approaching. At their table, He breaks the loaf of bread and blesses it and in an instant they KNOW He is Jesus, and the minute they KNOW, He vanishes from them. Happily, despair has also vanished. Fear has taken leave. Grief is doing somersaults. They just run out the door and don't stop running until they are back in Jerusalem in the upper room telling the 11 disciples. They tell them the story. And while they are all mulling this over, Jesus Himself enters the room. Jesus is about to re-tell the story, and even eat some fish in their company. He is going to give them a new mission to "go and tell the story over and over and over". They are to wait for awhile, until Jesus sends Power from on high to fill them. Finally, the first Sunday after the first Good Friday is over. Everyone can rest. Go to sleep and even dream again. Rest to awake refreshed to get up in the morning with a whole new adventure spread before them. It's NOT all over at all.

Well, here are a few quick lessons to be learned in the here and now of our worship and our lives. **First**, when grief and that shadow of the valley of death engulf you, don't be surprised if you can't see Jesus, even if He is standing right in front of your face. Find a friend or companion and Just. Keep. Walking. **Second**: It will be in the company of others, often while eating or extending hospitality, that you may find yourself most "open" to glimpses of the risen Christ. "Pot-Lucks" could be seen as "sacramental" if judged by the amount of God's healing they generate. **Third**: When our hearts burn within us, we are not to reach for the Tums, but rather get moving and go and tell. **Fourth**: the way to restore faith, build trust, witness to others, and have our own eyes opened more constantly to the Presence of Christ is to read, hear, and speak the Story...the Scriptures...the Word of God. Need help with forgiveness? Re-read the story of Joseph and his brothers. Want to understand where lies will lead you? Check out Jacob and Esau. Wonder if that mountain holding you back is just too high to ever get over? Take a walk with Gideon. Wonder if Jesus really loves you? Read His prayers

for you recorded by John. Troubles with your neighbours...a little Leviticus and some Matthew will resolve just about any dispute. Remember how Peter preached his very first sermon and explained through the Law and the Prophets all the things about Jesus which demonstrated that He was the Lord, the Messiah promised by God...Peter told the story given by God so that people would be convicted by the power of God and then take their broken hearts for the Healing Salvation of God all in the name of Jesus the Christ.

We don't need a new teaching or big expensive program in order to be witnesses. We just need to be able to tell the story...of what God did long ago, and of what God is doing in our lives right now. We can even practice being witnesses by simply telling each other such things when we come together for meals and fellowship. Throughout the scriptures it seems that "Go and Tell" is always learned best at the Table (Alter or dining room) with the family ( friends, faith family, our own family) .

When we enter into Eucharist, we walk as companions on the Road to Emmaus. First we gather together – it's not a Road to walk alone – and we open the secrets of our hearts to God who knows them already, and ask Him to cleanse us and fill us with the Holy Spirit. Thus prepared we listen as the Sacred Story is told again ... then we have it explained to us. Perhaps our hearts start to burn a little with the warmth of the written and spoken Word. Convicted and emboldened, we confess and repent and are blessed with God's forgiveness. Then we arrive at our spiritual home – the Altar of our God. And there, the Bread is broken, the Wine is poured, the Thanksgiving is given and Jesus Christ is present with us as surely as He was with them that afternoon in the home of Cleopas. Commissioned and empowered, we then go forth to love and serve the Lord. To take what we have received, share the Bread, pass the Wine and tell the story again and again to all who travel that sad road to Emmaus.

We cannot physically gather in this time of pandemic, but we can remember our Lord Jesus Christ until He comes. We can visualize Him here amongst us, wherever we

are, picking up the loaf and blessing and breaking and giving it. We can lift up our hands to receive the Wine from the cup in His hands. We can give thanks and we can pray: “Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen”. And Amen.