

## **Third Sunday of Easter**

### **April 23, 2023**

On the road again . . . I just can't wait to get on the road again . . .

What are you hoping for? Seriously. What are you hoping for? I imagine it's not a question most of us really think about very often, if ever. Yet, all of us (at some level) hope for all sorts of things. I hope to get good grades. I hope to get a great job. I hope to find true love. I hope to get over my illness. I hope to have a lot of friends. I hope my sports teams do well. I hope to be safe. I hope to go to heaven. Yes, we hope for many things.

The two disciples on the road to Emma-us had hoped for something too, they had hoped that their friend Jesus was the One, the one the Jewish people had been hoping for for a very long time. But things hadn't really gone as planned. One might even say that it had been a total mess, a disaster. Yet, in the midst of possibly the worst days of their lives, there remained a glimmer of hope. Some people actually had claimed that angels had announced that Jesus was alive. And while these two hadn't seen the Risen Jesus, they hoped there was some truth in what they had been hearing, some truth that something miraculous had happened.

Their hope had been dampened, but it had not disappeared completely.

What are you hoping for?

It's easy to hope for particular outcomes for all sorts of things. We do it all the time. And I don't mean to suggest that doing so is in any way being unfaithful. It's not. It's quite the opposite. God invites us to ask and seek and knock, and so we do precisely that. God wants us to place our needs and desires and concerns before him. But is that really what we mean by hope? Is the top of the list the place where these particular desires truly belong?

So often in our spiritual journey / lives we pray only in that one way, we only turn to God to give him our "shopping list" of wants and needs and dreams. And I'm not talking just about only frivolous things. I'm talking about the really serious things too - the things in our lives that are so painful we beg our God to relieve us of them. And when we pray exclusively that way, we can only experience one outcome - disappointment. Not one of us always gets what we want from God. Not one of us has all his or her crosses taken away and none of us gets to experience "solutions" to every one of our "problems". That's a fact of life.

In one sense, the disciples on the road to Emma-us were hoping for a particular outcome, and they got what they were hoping for. Jesus was alive! And their disappointment and worries were replaced by joy and excitement and wonder. Yet, I imagine they never would have been able to recognize Jesus, never would have had the incredible experience they had, if they were hoping in a very narrow sense.

Rather, it seems to me that these two disciples hoped in a much deeper way, a much more faithful kind of way, a much less specific kind of way. And it was this kind of faith-filled hope that made them ready for and open to all that Jesus wanted to provide for them and reveal to them. In a very real sense, what they were open to was grace, in fact they were open to an encounter with the very presence, the very life of God. In other words, Jesus didn't "force" them to believe, he didn't "force" them to see what he wanted them to see and experience. Rather, they were READY and OPEN to have an experience / an encounter with their Lord and God - the "burning" within their hearts. And Jesus did not disappoint them.

And so, maybe what we should be hoping for is hope itself - the kind of deep, faith-filled hope that allows us :

not to despair in times of sorrow or struggle;  
to trust that our God wants what's best for us;  
to be ready to encounter Jesus around every corner and in every situation in our lives;  
to be open to whatever it is God wants to reveal to us;  
to recognize him in the breaking of the bread, recognize him at this table and in each other;  
to be open to change, to be open to being more than we were yesterday and  
to live as people who know we have been forgiven, loved, saved.

On the road again . . . . I just can't wait to get on the road again. My dear friends in Christ, a true life of faith is a journey, a traveling from one place to another, a walking down a path leading us from that which is completely familiar to discovering something new - a sacred journey from an old way of seeing, thinking, and acting, to something more beautiful, more meaningful, more God-centered.

Yet, none of that can happen unless we are **READY** for it to happen, unless we **WANT** for it to happen, and unless we **BELIEVE** it can happen. What we need is to be a little more like the disciples on the road to Emma-us, with hearts on fire ready to encounter our loving God. And that takes an authentic kind of hope, the kind of hope that

doesn't die out when we face life's sorrows and disappointments, the kind of hope that endures. This is the kind of hope that helps us believe that we never have to walk down this road by ourselves. We have each other.

And we have our incredible God who walks alongside us through it all, making the journey not just bearable, but something of great joy and meaning and peace.

I just can't wait to get on the road again.