

The message for April 18 2021

Our scripture today comes from the gospel of Luke 24:13-35 and it goes like this;
¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^[b] ¹⁸ 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?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us^[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Easter is a time when we think about “Hope”. Hope that came when Christ was risen. Hope for a better future. A future where love prevails and we will have peace eternally. These lovely words can lift us up, at the same time can bring us down if we do not have a strong enough faith to know that God is with us. Why? After reading an inspirational devotional or after hearing a wonderful message/sermon, we tend to feel good about hope and the future. Then we go home to the reality of life. The pandemic is on many of our minds and can create shadows on our hope. Especially if we are struggling with our faith and questioning why life is not going the way we want it to go. From the perspective of church life, there are many who wonder how we can continue going on as a church. There are not as many people attending and let us not forget the finances of the church. Many members wonder about how we can afford to continue even after hearing hope from our team of dreamers. Hope fades with our fears and our worries.

In some respects, (our enduring through the pandemic or how we are concerned about our churches), it might feel similar to how the two disciples were feeling while journeying to Emmaus and going over the events that took place on Good Friday and the first Easter. They definitely lost their hope for the future. We heard of their loss of hope, when they were telling a stranger (Jesus not yet recognized) how the Jewish chief priest and leaders had Jesus, who they thought to be the messiah, had him condemned to death and crucified. They told the stranger of how some of their fellow followers saw visions of angels telling them that Jesus was still alive. Unfortunately, the two disciples wondered if the other followers really saw Jesus or if they just made up the story of the vision just to hold onto hope. If the disciples who knew Jesus lost hope, one would think it would be easy for us to wonder about the hope for the future for our church, our faith community and for all Christians everywhere. Like the disciples, we question how strong our faith is.

Going back to the gospel reading, Jesus (known only as the stranger to the disciples), reminds the disciples of what needed to happen based on scripture in order for the Messiah to enter into his glory. Through the journey and through

conversation the disciples finally recognize Jesus and hope is restored. The disciples' hope was restored.

Unfortunately, most of us, if not all of us, will not see Jesus the way that the disciples did and thus our struggle with hope will continue. However, I do believe we can see Jesus in a different way. We can see Jesus through each other. We can see Jesus through the thoughts and dreams of our joint team from First and Central, who have been dreaming of new ways to do church. We can see Jesus when we get involved with doing outreach in our communities. The outreach that comes from helping those who have lost their faith, by simply being there for them and showing compassion. Also, by helping those who are struggling because of loneliness in this pandemic. Again, just by making a simple phone call. We can see Jesus when we step out of our comfort zone to change the way we worship. We can see Jesus when we just let go of worrying about how we can continue as a church and trust that where ever God is leading us, we will be taken care of. The point is Jesus has never left us. Jesus walks with us when we are doing as Jesus has called us to do. Go out into the world and share the good news of God and to help, assist, accept and show love to everyone you meet. Kindness will reflect Jesus in you and those you help.

Matthew 25:34-40 confirms this when Jesus says ³⁵ *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

³⁷ *"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"*

⁴⁰ *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"*

As a church/faith community we simply need to get back to the outreach that Jesus taught us. I have said in previous devotionals, that worship in our traditional way is only a small portion of our faith. Traditional worship only reaches a very

small amount of people on a regular basis. In fact, only about 10% of Canada's population is reached through traditional worship. Those faith communities that seem to be thriving have started to focus on new ways to reach out to those who no longer attend or have never attended a church.

The same can be true for us. However, some of you may feel, even if we have ideas, even if we have hope, that we are tired, and there are very few of us and we do not have a lot of money in the bank.

I acknowledge many may feel tired. The one thing that I will always struggle with is money. Money should not be something that holds you back. Remember how Jesus sent the disciple out two by two without taking anything with them, which included money? Jesus told them to trust and have faith. The same is true for us. If there are ideas, let's work together to make them happen. Let us trust that the finances will follow. Let us also strengthen our faith to know when there is hope, and I mean hope that just bubbles up within you, even the most tired of people become alive all over again. The tiredness that you feel right now will change into energy that will guide you to the next step in our collective faith journey.

We have been called to be the church. We have been called to plant the seeds of faith. Yes, Jesus is walking with us on this journey. So, let us understand that the road we are on and the stranger who joins us on the road is in fact Jesus. There is hope for the future.

Praise be to God!

Pastor Paul