

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Grace to you from the God of all peace and *hope* in believing. Amen.

Your hope – it always betrays your deepest yearnings. And maybe that's not such a bad thing.

There are so many places in which to start in this long, wonderful journey of a story in Luke's Gospel. But this morning it seems appropriate to begin with those four little words the disciples speak in reply to this divine-stranger along the road. "But we had hoped..." *But we had hoped that this Jesus was the one. The one to redeem... The one to set free... The one (literally) to pay the ransom...*

You see, hope – it always betrays you. But maybe that's not such a bad thing.

About three and a half decades ago my parents moved into a house just outside of Minot, North Dakota. From the day I "came home" from the hospital as a newborn to the day I "left home" for college and even these years since, in so many ways it was the house that I knew as home. And this month my parents (who are retired) are selling that home and, of course, I'd be lying if I didn't say there was a part of me that... *had hoped I would always have that house "to go home to."*

Your hope often betrays you. And maybe that's not such a bad thing.

I remember the day I was confirmed like it was just twenty-one years ago this month... I didn't get to write a faith paper like our confirmation students did; but I'm sure if I did, I would've joined Reed and some of the other students in their description of always being drug to church by parents against my will, but appreciating it after the fact.

I do remember though at my confirmation *hoping* that when I said those words, "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me" or when the prayer was spoken, "Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, stir up in *Kent* the gift of your Holy Spirit; confirm his faith, guide his life, empower him in his serving, give him patience in suffering, and bring him to everlasting life..."

I remember *hoping* that would *really* happen... that my faith would undeniably, unmistakably feel truly *confirmed*. Maybe I *hoped* that Jesus himself would descend from the clouds and say, “I know this is the moment you’ve been waiting for Kent, and so... *here I am* [Jesus with jazz hands].”

It didn’t happen quite that way, but still hope – it often betrays you. And maybe that’s not always such a bad thing.

“But we had hoped...” It is many times the litany of our lives. *But we had hoped...*

We had hoped to travel more after retiring. *We had hoped* we wouldn’t be so busy after retiring. *We had hoped* the children wouldn’t have had to move so far away from home to get the jobs they did. *We had hoped* the children would have gotten a better job and moved out of the house. *We had hoped* she would’ve been the one for him. *We had hoped* he wouldn’t have been the one for him. *We had hoped* the cancer wouldn’t return. *We had hoped* the schizophrenia would have been diagnosed sooner. *We had hoped* the years wouldn’t have gone by so quickly. *We had hoped* the years would have gone by much more quickly. *We had hoped* Pastor Kent would have stayed forever. *Oh! We had hoped* Pastor Kent would have left years ago.

We had hoped...

Just the week after Easter Sunday, Pastor Tom and I attended a retreat for the pastors of the South Dakota synod. The speaker was a seminary professor I had in Chicago, Barbara Rossing. And she spoke about ecology (about the ways we *care for creation*) and eschatology (about *endings and end times*) and how important the two are for each other. Not only a theologian, but a scientist herself, she spoke passionately about the evidence and consensus in the scientific community on climate change and how it will affect most severely the poorest and the most vulnerable among us and why this makes it an important issue of faith for us as followers of Jesus.

I thought about this when Mackenzie spoke in her faith paper this last Wednesday evening. As she wrote, “As for views on the world, I hope it gets better, with less conflict, no pollution, more green spaces, slower or no global warming, and more. It might be along [*sic*] way off,” she wrote, “but I hope it can be accomplished. Faith might have helped to push people against each other because of disputes in the past, but hopefully we can change that around to do the opposite.”

It reminded me of Barbara Rossing, as she described the two most common responses to any challenge in our journey of faith: *denial* or *despair*. Both denial and despair in their own ways cripple any kind of creative response to the work that God calls us to, but the role of faith and the church is to drive a wedge between *denial* and *despair* – to open up even a tiny space for *hope* to be born.

Your hope – it often betrays you and your deepest yearnings. And maybe that’s not always such a bad thing.

Because, we see it with these two disciples (who walk with Jesus, all the while not seeing him for who he is). One is named Cleopas and one is unnamed (and anytime a character in the Bible is unnamed, of course, it’s an opportunity for you to put yourself in their shoes). “But we had hoped that [Jesus] was the one...” these disciples say.

And all the while, Jesus walks with them – Jesus, this one who was and is *the One*, they just don’t see it yet. And how different, really are we on our journey of faith? How much more, really do we see? But does our hope not betray the truth?

In her faith paper, Tori quoted the poem *Footprints* in which an individual has a dream that their whole life is seen as a walk on the beach and when the person questions Jesus as to why in the most difficult times there are only one set of footprints; Jesus, of course, responds it was during those times *I carried you*.

It’s a great story that in many ways echoes our Gospel story today where Jesus walks with these two disciples without them knowing it, but I chuckled... it reminded me of a parody. It’s a bit irreverent, I’ll admit, but at the end Jesus again says, “My child, I never left you. Those places with one set of footprints? It was then that I carried you.” But then Jesus adds, “...that long groove over there” *that’s* “when I dragged you for a while.”

But here’s the thing. Sometimes we feel so sad, because things don’t go the way we had hoped, but the truth is God has fulfilled our hopes and then some... it’s just not the way we expected things to go.

Because the great irony is that *the hope of the two disciples (the hope that Jesus was the one...)* – *this hope has already been fulfilled*, they just don’t see it yet, perhaps because they’re blinded by despair and denial.

They think they know what “*the one*” looks like. They think they know what “*redemption*” looks like. “Surely,” they think, “*hope* doesn’t look like someone suffering and dying on a cross,” does it? “Surely,” they think, “*hope* can’t look like a graveyard with a tomb sealed so tight and so heavy,” can it?

But then the wedge of hope. “Surely, *hope* doesn’t look like an empty tomb, does it?” “Surely, hope can’t be as simple as a stranger walking and talking and sharing the burden along the way, can it?” “Surely, *hope* isn’t as ordinary and plain as this stranger, this *one*, taking bread, blessing and breaking it, and giving it ... is it?”

And that’s when they see, that their hearts have been burning with hope for so long. That’s when the disciples see (when *we see*) that a home has nothing to do with a house (even if you’ve known that house as home for 8 years or 35), but home is where you experience God’s love. It’s when the disciples see (when *we see*) that faith *is confirmed* not by our own doing (not by getting the correct words or the right prayer or even having Jesus descend from the clouds with jazz hands), but simply by the grace of God in unexpected, mysterious, sometimes hidden often ordinary and plain ways.

That’s when the disciples see (and when *we see*) that *nothing can separate us...* from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

“You know, I always thought God was just a *part* of my life...” said Reneé in the faith paper she read on Wednesday evening with both wisdom and foolishness beyond her years (like the other students as well). “Now I realize” she continued “God *is* my life.”

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith,” the apostle Paul wrote to the original confirmation students, the Romans, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... and we boast in our *hope*... And not only that, but we also boast in our *sufferings*, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces *hope*, and *hope* [brothers and sisters, *even the tiniest wedge of hope between despair and denial*] does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit...”

May we come to see this and all things through faith in God through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.