

THEY HAD HOPED, AND WE HOPE
Acts 2: 14a, 36-41; Luke 24: 13-35
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by Pat Berger

Luke's recording of Jesus' conversation on the road to Emmaus was likely a compilation of a few post-resurrection appearances by Jesus to various ones of the disciples. Notice that, as the writer of the Gospel according to Luke has recorded it for us, the conversation took place on a road. Jesus did not meet Cleopas and the other disciple at a Presbytery meeting, or over a cup of coffee after worship; they met on a road, the road to Emmaus, we are told. We aren't told what the connection to that location might be. It was a road, and it was a hike -- approximately seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, enough that your feet would know they had done their job for the day.

This is a Day of Resurrection story; "on that same day", Resurrection Day, the writer tells us, two of them were walking on this road, talking about all that had happened, and Jesus joined them as they walked. "What's up?" he might ask today, but as it is recorded in Luke, he asked them what they were discussing as they journeyed. Cleopas and the other disciple -- who was never named -- did not recognize Jesus; he was as a stranger -- don't we all hope we would recognize Jesus? They were sad as they answered that they were talking about Jesus, "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." About, "how the chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him." About the women who had gone to the tomb and had not found Jesus' body there. We had hoped, they said; we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. They had dared to hope, and it did not seem to have worked out.

Have you had hope at times, hope that may have been dashed? That was where the two were. Jesus -- still a stranger to them -- called them foolish, although most think the word would have been gently applied -- as if he were calling them "sillies" or something like that. Then he began to, "interpret to them the things about him in all the scriptures." He started with Moses, went through the prophets -- the whole story. Still: they seemed not to be getting it. There is always a turning point, though -- thank goodness. They arrived at Emmaus and asked him to stay, since it was late; he went in with them. And when they ate, "he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them." "Then their eyes were opened" -- no longer a stranger, now again their companion -- "they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight."

He vanished as companion, though. The two disciples began to talk with each other about the discussions they had had with Jesus on the road -- why hadn't they recognized him, they must have asked themselves. Hope was reborn very

rapidly; within the hour, they were on their way back to Jerusalem -- seven miles again -- and they found the other disciples, and told them of their meeting with the Risen One. "The Lord has risen indeed!" they said. And they told about the encounter on the road and about the breaking of the bread. They had hope; they brought hope.

Another who had hope, certainly, was Simon Peter. We didn't hear the reading from the Book of the Acts this morning, but the verses are so familiar and fit so well with this story that I am going to reference them here. The verses are at the end of one of Peter's sermons, and those who had been listening, we are told, "were cut to the heart." They asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Hope is being born, I think. Fortunately for them, they were listening to those who had known Jesus as companion, who could tell them the only thing needed: "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ.' 'For the promise is for you, for your children and for all who are far away, everyone whom the LORD our God calls to him.'" And that day about three thousand hopeful people were added to their number. That would have been a sight to see! Clearly there was work to be done for the Kingdom, and imagine the lift, the hope, the start that it gave all of those workers when they heard stories from Peter and Cleopas and the other disciple. Now they would be ready for Spirit when it came, as Jesus had promised, ready to receive Spirit and then ready to go out to take Spirit with them and share it wherever they went. No more sitting, waiting, in the dark.

We aren't exactly like those first hearers; resurrection stories are not a surprise to us. Still, sometimes, hope seems like a project. And, sometimes we have been surprised, when we have met Jesus on our road. Likely, if we paid better attention, we would be surprised more often. Jesus does show up on the road, when we are sad or hurting or -- especially these days -- trying to make sense of whatever may be going on at a particular moment in time. And as he did with Cleopas and the other disciple, he doesn't just say, there, there, now, everything is going to be ok. When Jesus shows up, he walks the road with us; he asks, "what things?" -- how are you sad or hurting or confused or lonely? Jesus wants to walk the road, every road, with us; he wants us to know that he is walking with us. He comes alongside each and every one of the beloved children; he comes as companion and walks with us as we claim and live the lives of those who recognize the risen Christ. When we listen to the news, we hear again and again that we are living through something unlike anything that any of us or any of anyone has ever experienced in this lifetime, and we hope that we won't again. And we hope. We know that we don't walk this road alone, ever; pay attention: Jesus is our companion on the road.

Let us pray.