

“Turn Disappointments into Dreams”

Luke 24:13-35

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For

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It was time for them to go home. The sun would be setting soon, and they had about a two hour walk ahead of them.

There were two of them, but we only know the name of one, Cleopas. What these two people had in common was their love for Jesus and their friendship with the disciples.

That Sunday evening when they began this seven mile journey from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus, they were still reeling from Jesus' crucifixion and burial three days earlier. Their hearts were heavy and so were their steps. It was as if they were walking uphill the entire way, an indication how low their spirits were.

As they walked, they talked. They were reliving the events of recent days, which included the crucifixion of Jesus on Friday and the news of the empty tomb on Sunday morning.

They were even in the room with the disciples earlier that morning when Mary burst in with news of the empty tomb. They wanted to believe her, but their skepticism kept getting in the way.

They remained in Jerusalem all day hoping to get more information, but it never came. So, they said their goodbyes and hit the road, carrying with them more questions than answers and more despair than hope.

As they made their way back home, another person suddenly joined them. They did not recognize who he was, which could have been due to the lack of light in the sky or the heavy burden they were carrying.

Grief and confusion have a way of distracting us and keeping us from focusing. We don't see nor think clearly when our hearts are broken.

The stranger asked what they were discussing, which stopped them in their tracks. Cleopas could hardly believe there was anyone in or near Jerusalem who was unaware of what had happened to Jesus at the end of the previous week.

"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" Cleopas asked. (24:18)

"What things?" Jesus replied. (24:19)

This question gave Cleopas and his companion an opportunity to pull all their thoughts together from their conversation on this journey. They described in detail what happened to Jesus and how they felt about it.

"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all of this, it is now the third day since these things took place." (24:21)

Clearly, this revealed their mounting disappointment. After witnessing Jesus' crucifixion, they had given up on him being the long awaited Messiah who would overthrow the Romans and liberate the Jews from oppression.

When they finished reminiscing, Jesus began teaching. He recalled the words the prophets wrote about the Messiah and shed new light on their meaning. He told them the Messiah was to be a suffering servant who would put the needs of others above his own and be faithful to carry out the divine mission assigned to him, the pursuit of justice and peace for all.

As the three of them drew near the village where Cleopas and his companion lived, Jesus picked up his pace and separated from them. They insisted he spend the night with them, and he accepted their invitation.

As they gathered later to eat their evening meal, Jesus assumed the role of the host in spite of his being a guest in their home. In a manner similar to the way he fed the five thousand around the Sea of Galilee and served the disciples in the Upper Room on Thursday evening, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them.

When he did this, the eyes of these two traveling companions were opened, and they recognized him. Jesus did not linger long after this. He departed as quickly as he had come to them earlier that evening.

These two weary travelers may have been exhausted from their seven mile trek from Jerusalem to their home, but this did not keep them from returning to Jerusalem. This good news could not wait until Monday to be shared. Before that night ended, their testimony had to be heard.

Each time I study this story, I am drawn to a different part of it. Let me share the portion that captured my attention last week. It is the words of Cleopas to the stranger where he reveals his disappointment in Jesus' ministry and his doubts about the resurrection.

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all of this, it is now the third day since these things took place.”

This lament has sorrow, sadness and disappointment written all over it. Jesus did not live up to their expectations, and things did not turn out the way they thought they would.

Once again, they found themselves walking through the cemetery of broken dreams. They had been there before. It was all too familiar.

But the story doesn't end on this dreary note. To the contrary, despair was replaced by hope and the promise of a better life. Sorrow was turned to joy as their hearts burned within them.

What made the difference? What led to this change of outlook and attitude?

I think it was a combination of what Jesus and these two followers of his did. All three did what was needed for this positive transformation to occur. **What was this?**

Jesus listened to them, and they listened to Jesus.

This story highlights the role listening plays in overcoming disappointment and breaking free from its crippling power. It is essential. As a matter of fact, it is the first step in moving toward a new and better place.

Jesus listened to these two disciples and gave them the opportunity to voice their confusion, frustrations, sorrow, sadness, disappointments and despair.

At the same time, they listened to Jesus as he explained the scriptures in ways they had never understood.

How did Jesus respond when Cleopas asked if he was the only stranger in Jerusalem who did not know what everyone was discussing that weekend? He simply replied, "What things?"

Why did Jesus do this? Why did he act so naïve?

He wanted Cleopas and his friend to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. He did not want to assume anything. In order to help them that evening, he needed to know what they were thinking and feeling.

At the same time and to their credit, Cleopas and his companion listened intently to what Jesus was saying. They were not defensive or resistant to what he was teaching. Instead, they opened their hearts and minds, and as a result, their eyes were opened, too.

From this story, I see even more clearly how important listening is to overcoming disappointment and charting a new path forward. Hope and healing are dependent upon everyone being good listeners. Listening always precedes transformation.

This leads me to ask: Whose story filled with confusion, frustration, sorrow, sadness, disappointment and despair do you need to listen to this week? Whose advice rooted in a deeper and broader understanding of life and relationships do you need to listen to under your present circumstances?

When you put the two together, as happened on the road to Emmaus, I believe the Holy Spirit draws near. God's Spirit opens eyes, hearts and minds to help everyone chart a new and better path forward.

Is this a message you need to hear as we continue to deal with COVID-19? It certainly speaks to me.

There is no shortage of disappointment going around these days. Almost everyone has put his or her plans on hold as one event after another is canceled.

This is especially true for our youth and young adults. To date, forty-one states have cancelled school on a campus for the remainder of the year. All instruction must occur through the use of technology.

This means sporting events, school plays, concerts, recitals, proms and graduations have been wiped off the calendar. I cannot imagine how difficult this is for everyone involved.

In addition, college graduates like we honored today are entering the job market at the worst of times. It has been over one hundred years since the economy was shut down due to a global pandemic.

I can hear young adults all over the world saying, "We had hoped..."

One of the seniors I heard from through the *Lexington Herald* is Rena Childers. Rena is a senior at Pomona College in California, but she grew up in Lexington and graduated from Henry Clay High School.

She wrote a recent article titled, "Future Looks Bleak to College Seniors Stuck at Home." Listen to how she describes what it is like to be entering the job market during an economic shutdown with high unemployment.

"A friend called me yesterday in a tearful fit. She expressed how worthless this whole situation has made her feel.

After hanging up, I realized I felt the same. I anticipated feeling nervous about this transition into adulthood, but what I did not expect to feel was hopelessness. Under normal

circumstances this transition is difficult and requires soul-searching. These circumstances are anything but normal.

My newfound freedom to make choices is suddenly restricted and the forthcoming months, a time that should be spent exploring career possibilities and imagining a new and exciting life, are instead bound by federal and state directives.

I seek not to relay one college senior's experience, but rather offer a general indication of the frustration, anxiety and sadness many in my generation currently feel. This pandemic is testing not only our health but our mental and emotional health as well."

In addition to our graduating seniors, I can also hear families throughout our land expressing similar sentiments as they bury their loved ones who have become victims of this highly contagious and vicious virus. Two months ago they never dreamed they would literally be walking through a cemetery.

Husbands, wives, parents, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and cousins from all walks of life and ages are saying, "We had hoped..."

How can you help them deal with their sadness and disappointment? Do what Jesus did for those two heartbroken disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Listen to their stories. Give them the gifts of time and presence. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings.

"Give sorrow words," Shakespeare wrote. He knew how essential this is on the journey toward hope and healing.

Let them lean on your shoulder and lend them an ear. Be there when they need someone to listen, as Jesus was for the two on the road to Emmaus.

You are being the presence of Christ when you do this. I assure you he will be grateful.

It is not enough, though, just to listen. Share with them what you do to overcome disappointment.

Be specific and describe challenges you have faced. Tell them what you learned from dealing with adversity.

I'll tell you what I have learned.

We have been created by God to deal with disappointment so we can move beyond it. Faith always pulls us onward and upward.

This means disappointment is a call to action, not an excuse to roll in self-pity and to give up. Adversity provides us with an opportunity to turn disappointment into dreams as we head in new directions and to make the best of bad situations.

Whose story filled with confusion, frustration, sorrow, sadness, disappointment and despair do you need to listen to this week?

May God make you aware of those around you during this pandemic who need you to be there for them.

Whose advice rooted in a deeper and broader understanding of life and relationships do you need to seek and listen to under your present circumstances?

May God connect you to these people who can help you turn disappointments into new dreams.