

SPIRITUAL EYESIGHT

Luke 24:13-35 Text: vs. 31 *"Their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And He disappeared from their sight."*

Some of the saddest words in the English language begin with the letter D. Disappointment. Doubt. Disillusionment. Defeat. Despair. Death. Dispirited. Those words sum up how Cleopas, and his companion on the Road to Emmaus, felt in our lesson this morning. Jesus, the One they had adored, loved, and followed had been horribly put to death. It was a cruel death. Crucifixion. The most shameful, degrading death of any kind. Victims were made a public spectacle. They were exposed to the taunts and jeers of all that passed by. It had only been a week since the disciples' hopes had risen to fever pitch on Palm Sunday. Excited crowds welcomed Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. He was the longed-for Deliverer from the cruelty of Rome. Now, a week later, He was dead. Buried in a borrowed tomb with a large stone rolled across its entrance to seal it. Hopes were dashed! Dreams were over! And Jesus' followers were leaderless. And these two despondent, dispirited disciples summed it all up when a stranger suddenly appeared out of nowhere to join them on their way home to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. *"We had hoped that He was the One who was going to redeem Israel"* they told the stranger.

The events of that awful Friday were still fresh in their minds when Jesus was crucified. They had left the disciples dispirited and confused back in Jerusalem and headed home. Reports were already being heard about Jesus' tomb being empty. It did nothing to change their minds. It only confused them. Their world had come apart. And you know, hope is a fragile thing. When hope fades, life seems impossible. It's difficult to recover. Hopelessness of the human spirit is hard to overcome.

According to the Center for Disease Control someone dies, on average, by suicide every 12.3 minutes. And there's a direct relationship between teen depression and suicide. The CDC reports that between the ages of 10 and 24, suicide is the third leading cause of death. Suicide results in approximately 4,600 lives lost each year. Drugs. 3 million 12- to 17-year-olds nationwide report using drugs last month. And when someone you love is overtaken by an illness, that can go on and on, despair soon sets in. You're afraid to hope. You're afraid of another letdown.

Have you ever been so busy doing so many things that someone tells you the next day you passed them on the street without acknowledging them. They had said *"hello"* to you and waved. Embarrassing! How about when you're running late? The harder you try to make up for lost time, the more you mess things up! That's when you want to just let out a big sigh and give up! So, when your life gets too hectic. Too sad. Too confusing. Too much to handle. What do you do? Where do you go to sort things out? Where do you find comfort and peace?

Our lesson this morning teaches that you can learn from the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It was God's Word that led them out of their despair. And when life gets you down, go to God's Word. Seek its counsel. There's a key phrase in our Scripture passage today that offers a clue as to how Jesus' followers in Jerusalem understood what they had just witnessed. *"...they beat their breasts and went away."*

You see, beating your breast was a characteristic sign of mourning. Striking one's breast is profoundly human and humble. For some, it expresses great emotion of extreme sorrow. Sadness. Grief. Imagine for a moment how hopeless the situation must have been for those in and around Jerusalem. The Man that they had seen heal the sick, feed thousands, love the unlovable, and teach the word of God like no one had ever taught before, was gone. Peter had seen Jesus walking on water calming the storm. And when Peter who also walked on water out to meet Jesus in the boat had his own faith fail when he looked down and saw where he was - he began sinking into the Sea of Galilee. He was saved by Jesus. Now, hope was gone. Peter had seen Jesus arrested, tried, crucified, and laid in a tomb. After three days, the disciples were still hiding. They were afraid! Think about Peter's despair over having betrayed Jesus. He had denied Jesus three times. And it had to have been replayed in his mind over and over. The disciples had witnessed His death and burial. They had to have been in a state of hopelessness, despair, and disbelief. They had to have been saying the same thing Cleopas was saying. *"...we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel."* Those two men on the road to Emmaus thought all was lost.

But what they didn't know was, *The Story* was still unfolding! Confusion is not a sign God has abandoned you. Yes, Jesus' resurrected presence brought confusion to His followers. And sometimes, God does catch you off guard. But confusion is not a bad thing. It may be uncomfortable. But it's not a bad thing. Confusion can lead to discovery. Confusion can lead to new truth. Confusion can be healthy. Confusion can be God breaking into your world with a new perspective. Or a new understanding.

A student wrote on a physics exam that he did not believe there was an atom. So, he didn't write a term paper about it as instructed. The professor called him up and asked him why? The student said he didn't believe in atoms. *"I've never seen one, and no one else has either."* The professor felt he should give the young man a failing grade. And it was true, an actual atom had never been seen. But the evidence for their existence was well known. So, the professor explained to the student the effect of atoms on matter. Mathematical formulas prove they must be there and can predict their behavior and help understand the nature of the atom and how to combine them to make new products. Suddenly, the student understood the logic of the atom as the professor explained it. No one has seen an atom. It's true. But then, no one has

seen God. But His power and His presence has been in the hearts and lives of Christians for thousands of years. He has been changing lives in predictable ways. The vastness of creation. The constant cycle of life in the universe. Everything points to the reality of God. And Christ's resurrection.

Those disciples on the Road to Emmaus listened to Jesus as He told them about God's Word. They listened as He comforted them. And God's Word will comfort you, too! Read again the Gospel accounts of what happened during Holy Week. Read the Resurrection Story. Yes, there was confusion. But God walked with those two men on the Road to Emmaus. He lifted the fog of their understanding. A New Day came when God's people were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Faith was renewed.

There's a painting of an old, burned-out mountain shack. All that remained of it was the chimney, and the charred debris of what had once been that family's sole possession. It's kinda' like what happened to a lot of people on Chokoloskee Island, Ft. Myers Beach, and Sanibel Island after Hurricane Ian. In front of that destroyed home stood an old *grandfatherly-looking* man, dressed only in his underclothes. A small boy stood beside the old man clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was apparent, the child was crying. And beneath the picture, the artist had placed the words which sensed what the old man was speaking to the boy: "*Hush child, God ain't dead!*" Does that speak to you? Open your eyes!

Look at all of which you have been blessed. God's plan for you may include a new beginning. A new hope. A new faith. It was like that for those two disciples when they finally realized Jesus was walking with them. The Bible teaches that in Christ Jesus, all things will become new. It will be for you, if you will open your spiritual eyes and see God in your life. Let Jesus walk through life with you. Let Him explain God's plan for your life. Your heart will burn, as those two men's hearts burned, because when their eyes were opened, they saw Jesus. And after He disappeared from their sight, they asked each other, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*"

That can happen to you when you let Jesus walk with you on your road through life. You may not see the whole picture of your life now. That may be what's causing you confusion. But God has the big picture for your life. And He's faithful to guide you along your way. You may be asking, "How do I do that?"

There's a song we've sung so often. It has the answer to that question! It's on page number 500 in your hymnal. Let's stand and sing it together. Remember, it's not confusion. It's how you respond to confusion. And here's the answer. It's in the hymn on page 500.

Precious Lord, take my hand,
lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night,
lead me on to the light,
take my hand, precious Lord
lead me home.

When my way grows drear,
precious Lord, linger near,
when my life is almost gone;
hear my cry, hear my call,
hold my hand lest I fall:
take my hand, precious Lord,
lead me home.

When the darkness appears
and the night draws near,
and the day is past and gone;
at the river, I stand,
guide my feet, hold my hand:
take my hand, precious Lord,
lead me home.

AMEN