

**THE HOPE OF EASTER**  
**Luke 24:13-35**

**Messiah Easter Service**  
**March 31, 2013**  
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There is an old story about a guy who was out jogging one night. He was going down a road in the dark and he thought he'd just slip through a cemetery. He started jogging through this cemetery and there was a fresh grave there, getting ready for the next day, and he happened to fall into the hole. And the hole was so deep he couldn't climb out.

He tried jumping out, climbing out, called for help. Nobody could hear him. Finally he said to himself, "You know, I'm going to spend the night here until someone comes to get me in the morning." And so he crawled in a corner and tried to doze off.

A little while later another jogger came through the cemetery and fell in the same hole. And this guy started jumping, trying to get out. And all of a sudden he felt a hand on his shoulder. And then he heard a voice say, "You can't get out of here." But amazingly he did jump out.

You know, sometimes we go through circumstances in life and we think, "I can't get out of this one." And you can see the image of a road being projected. And there are two ways you can look at a road. You can look at a road as a way of saying, "You know that's where I've been—that's my past." Or you can look at a road and say, "This is where I am and this is where I am headed.

The hope of Easter we celebrate today is that there is hope and grace for your past. And yet the hope of Easter also says there's an amazing power for the road that you're traveling on, power for whatever may be ahead of you.

Some of you right now are traveling down a road that looks like this one. It's kind of rough and rocky, isn't it? And it's difficult. It is the road of disappointment. It is the road of broken dreams. It is the road of disillusionment.

It was a road very much like this one that two of the followers of Jesus, on that first Easter, were traveling down toward a little village called Emmaus. These guys, wow, they'd had the hope completely knocked out of them.

They had left family. They had left careers. They had left relationships, everything, to follow Jesus. They thought Jesus was going to set up his earthly kingdom; free them from Roman occupation and oppression.

And now Jesus is dead. He died on the cross on Friday. Their family members had said, "You're crazy following this guy." And now they were really wondering, "Maybe we were crazy. Maybe we were mistaken about Jesus."

So they were headed down this road of disappointment. They encounter a stranger that they didn't recognize and they start talking about the recent events that had occurred in Jerusalem that week—the death of Jesus, the one who they followed.

Then they made this revealing statement in Luke 24:21. They said, *“But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”* Notice clearly the first four words of that phrase, *“But we had hoped...”*

My guess is that there is not one of you in this sanctuary today who hasn't at one time or another said a phrase similar to that. “But I had hoped the business downsizing wouldn't affect me.” “But I had hoped my son, my daughter, was finally growing up; finally getting their act together; finally over that addiction.”

“But I had hoped to be married by now, have children by now.” “But I had hoped we'd seen the last of the cancer in our family.” “But I had hoped we'd be able to have a child, another child.” “But I had hoped we'd have a healthy child.”

“But I had hoped that when we said those words ‘til death do us part’ that our marriage would be forever.” “But I had hoped that when we moved to the Hoffman area or to some other city, it was going to be the best days ahead of us.” I had hoped one thing, but then in reality it was another. I wanted this, but it turned out a different way.

A few years ago I read an article by a father. At that time he had sons who were 23 and 19 year old. When these boys were 7 and 3 both were diagnosed with a debilitating disease that continued to get worse over the course of their lives.

These boys at age 23 and 19 lived everyday in a wheelchair, connected to ventilators, unable to feed themselves, bathe themselves, dress themselves. This man and his wife for 15 years had cared for these boys day in, day out. Never in that time did they take a family vacation. They didn't know what it is like to get away for a few days at a Spring break. This was their life.

Sometimes the difficult road that you are traveling down is not just for a few days or few weeks; sometimes it's years; sometimes it's a lifetime. There are people who will be in a wheelchair for a lifetime. Alzheimer's, or memory loss, gets progressively worse. There are some who have disabling illnesses for which there are no cures. They live with them everyday.

Sometimes we wonder if this hope of Easter we talk and sing about...yeah, it's grace for the road behind me, but what about for right now? What about for the road I'm traveling on today, and for wherever I'm headed?

These two disciples on the road to Emmaus were despondent, down. They were headed west toward the end of the day so the sun was in their eyes, and they didn't recognize who was traveling with them. God kept them from realizing who it was.

They didn't know that true hope was right under their noses. They didn't know that the person walking with them was the one they had followed—Jesus Christ. Jesus the second person of the Trinity; the Son of God. They were unaware that this person was their strength and power.

You know when they realized who it was? It was when they slowed down. Luke 24:30 says, “As they hurried through the drive through at McDonalds with their express pass, getting a rush order...” No, that is not what it says.

It says, “*When he,*”—he is Jesus—“*was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him...*” When they slowed down for a moment, shared this meal, their eyes were opened and they realized: We’re not alone. God is truly with us.

You know, my friends, my prayer this week for each of you who’ve been traveling down difficult roads in your life has been that maybe today Easter for you...you would slow down long enough, have your eyes opened and recognize God. He’s available to you.

I’ve been praying a very similar prayer to the one the Apostle Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:19-20. I will read it to you from the Living Bible. He said, “*I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great (God’s) power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead...*”

I just want you to know, my friends, from the very bottom of my heart, I’m praying you’ll understand this truth that God’s power can help you. This power that raised Jesus from the dead can help you if you will believe in him; if you’ll trust him; if you’ll walk with him.

Those two guys on the road to Emmaus, they’d kind of given up hope. What they didn’t know was that hope was right there under their noses. What they didn’t realize was that this good news of God’s hope was right there in their presence.

And what I’m sure some of you today may not recognize is that this same hope is right here in front of your noses. Hope is available to you. And Easter 2013 for you who are walking down this rough and rocky road is a chance to say, “I’m going to believe. I’m going to trust.”

“I’m going to put my hand in God’s hand and I’m going to slow down.” Could you slow down long enough this morning to have that moment with God? Will you confess these words to Jesus, “I will trust you; I will believe in you; I will walk with you each day.”

I will trust you God that you’re going to give me supernatural resources each new day, each new week, each new year, for the challenges that I have to face, no matter what they are.

While Charis sings, you might want to take the opportunity to say, “I will trust. I’ll take God’s hand and I’ll squeeze it.” Some of you have had God’s hand in the past and maybe you’ve kind of stopped holding tightly.

Right now is a chance to say, “God, I’m going to trust in that resurrection power for my circumstances, in my life, right now.”