

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 30, 2017 (Easter 3)

O God, by the humble death and resurrection of your son, you have freed us from fear and death, so that we may live in prayerful hope, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Road to Emmaus teaches us about prayer and communion and how they are inseparable.

The two followers are walking and talking when Jesus catches up to them. His simple question, "What are you talking about?" gets the conversation going. They explain their shock over Jesus' death, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Their hopes were dashed. And *now* his body is gone and some women said they saw angels declaring him alive."

What's going here? Might they be praying and not even know it? They are in communion with each other, with Jesus, with the source of life. They aren't asking for anything, only seeking peace in their confusion and sorrow. The conversation continues but they don't make the connection to Jesus until he blesses and breaks bread and gives it to them. They have much to think about now. Is that not prayer? Their communion with Jesus is not about thoughts in their heads, but about making room for the real Jesus and his message in a quiet moment for peace and understanding.

They had been looking for a Messiah to fix things. And so they misunderstand Jesus and his ministry. They thought Jesus was going to set things right for Israel. Turns out he was teaching them the more important work of how to live and pray. The church often forgets that and turns the Bible into a self-help book or a leadership manual of how to be great or successful. Jesus is not concerned about greatness or success, but about living in the eternal presence of Life and Love.

Evidently they were not looking to be taught how to live and pray. "They had hoped" for many things from Jesus and none of them involved sacrifice or consecration to love and justice come what may. They had been so focused on what *they* wanted that they were blind to what they needed: Listening love, listening prayer.

So as they speak with this stranger, they hear the biblical story from a different perspective—from the standpoint of grief, disappointment, defeat. "This is different, he sounds a bit like Jesus." But now it has a different feel. Then Jesus makes as if to keep walking beyond their stop, "Hey, don't go on, it's getting dark, stay with us a little longer." The thirst for more, combined with hospitality brings hopeful awakening.

They go inside, pull some bread out of the cupboard, they're quite hungry after walking 3 or so hours, sit down, and suddenly Jesus jumps into action, takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Then it all makes sense. It all comes together. They get it. The light has finally turn on. Now they will rethink everything Jesus ever said or did. They will do so in good company and they have time.

Jesus' death wasn't a mistake. It was the Godman's final demonstration of what it means to live and love fearlessly. And his presence in love was not diminished by his death, only increased. Now their eyes are opened. Spiritual presence in prayer has no limit, no beginning, no end. Jesus is now present in holy memory and holy presence. God with us in prayer, in peace.

That was Luke telling the story 2000 years ago. What is our story now?

Where do you go with your deep disappointment? Who do you talk to when the darkness closes in? Is there a friend who will listen? I'm not talking about minor frustrations from day to day, I'm talking about depression which makes us want to give up.

Jesus' friends said, "we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel." Perhaps we might say, "we had hoped our child or spouse would recover," or "I hoped my job would last," or "I was hoping for a better relationship with my spouse, son or daughter, mother or father, or friend," or "we hoped the cancer would go into remission" or, "I had never thought life could be so lonely," or "We hoped our church would remain strong, and never decline." What is your deep disappointment?

We all live with disappointment. Many live with depression. Prayer does not make the disappointment or depression go away. Prayer is not about me getting what I want. Prayer is about not being alone. It's

about communion. Prayer is about accidentally talking to and listening to Jesus or another and then being surprised that you have found One for whom you have searched long and hard.

But this surprise encounter will only happen when we finally give up trying to get what we want. Another way of putting it is that we won't find God until we give up all of our cherished and feared expectations of God.

Our tendency is to tell God who God is, and how God should be for us, for as long as we have been able to think of the Ground of all Being. Some of the thoughts have been good thoughts, others, not so much. But the only way to the truth and the life, is by letting it all go (like the disciples on the road to Emmaus), and then accepting what's left, on the other side of letting go, of giving it all up.

You see, the road to Emmaus teaches us that our deep disappointments are the starting point in prayer. We must not deny the painful struggle. so painful, without owning, without naming them, we can never fully commune with God, and we may always be an arms' distance away from this life which never ends.