

It wasn't a particularly long walk, 7 miles on foot away from the city. Yet, this may have been the most heart-breaking, gut-wrenching, and painstakingly difficult walk these men were ever going to make. The road was likely busy, this was the first day on which they could travel away from Jerusalem, the city of God. I'm sure it hardly seemed like this most holy and awesome city to them now. Like many others, they had been there to celebrate the Passover. The Passover was the remembrance of God's mercy on his people in Egypt. A mercy bought through the blood of lambs painted on doorframes. I wonder, were they doubting God's mercy now? The Sabbath had come, and the Sabbath had gone, but they likely felt no rest.

And on this busy road, while these two men trudged onward towards their destination, a single traveler joined them. However, St. Luke makes clear to us this was no common passerby. This traveler was Jesus, the risen Christ! But, they were kept from recognizing him. Can you imagine their annoyance? While deep in conversation, counting step after step on their way to Emmaus, a seemingly mere stranger has the audacity to ask them, **"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"**

Notice how the two men respond to Jesus' probing question. **"They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, names Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"** A tornado of emotion had been swirling around these two men and finally it erupts in Cleopas' questioning response of Jesus. Again, Jesus speaks, **"What things?" he asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentence to death, and they crucified him.'"** Seriously man? Are you kidding? *You alone* haven't heard about all the things that have happened? You didn't hear about the renowned teacher who performed countless miraculous deeds? The one who was powerful enough to drive out demons? And even more than that was *our friend!* Yet, he was betrayed by one of his closest companions. Then, he was tried before corrupt politicians who sentenced him to death. Even worse, he was given the most humiliating death possible, crucifixion. And *even if* you didn't hear about all that. Did you not notice the earthquakes three days ago? How about the overwhelming darkness during the middle of that day? Or maybe how the curtain covering the Holy of Holies was torn in two? Are you really the *only one* who didn't hear about all of this?

It's hard to argue with the incredulous nature of these disciples' questioning. It's also difficult to criticize their emotional state. We just read that when Jesus questioned them, **"They stood still, their faces downcast."** When tragedy strikes your life, how do you react? Do you act like your Savior has risen, or rather, do you act like these two disciples? Lost and alone in your **doubt and despair.**

The two disciples continue **"but we HAD hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since this all took place."** Here it is. This shows the real problem these disciples were facing: a fundamental misunderstanding of what Jesus was here to do. I will say it again. **They were lost in doubt and despair because they didn't understand what Jesus was here to do.** The Emmaus disciples hoped that Jesus would free the political nation of Israel from the hands of a ruthless Roman regime. They thought he would take back the kingdom with glory and power and might and establish an earthly rule. This was a common problem of Jesus' disciples. Earlier in Jesus ministry, two of his apostles, James and John asked Jesus if they could sit at his right and his left when he entered glory. Even after Jesus had appeared to the apostles following his resurrection, they were still concerned with political deliverance!

It is easy to judge these two disciples here. *How* could you guys get it so wrong? *How* could you not understand what Jesus was here to do? But I ask you again, what do you do when tragedy strikes? Maybe you run to the foot of the cross and rely wholly on Jesus. Or maybe you, like me, react with doubt and despair, displaying a misunderstanding of what Jesus' death means for your life.

How's this whole "Christian" thing working out for you? Oh, you've never sought prestige or power like the disciples, but maybe you expected life to be a little easier. "I'm not asking for much Jesus, just the odd dollar here or there to make ends meet." Or maybe you thought being a Christian would at least offer some comfort in health. However, trips in and out of the hospital seem to be pointing to the opposite. "Fine, Jesus, I don't care about health or wealth, I just don't want to be lonely. I'm tired of feeling as if the only person who cares about me is me."

The proof was staring these two men right in the face. Jesus himself had predicted countless times that he would die and rise! Earlier on that very morning, trustworthy women testified to seeing angels at the tomb! And these angels had said Jesus was alive! They should have known! The tomb was empty. The body gone. How could they not recognize the truth right in front of them?

I pose the same question to you, dear Christian. How can you not recognize the answer right in front of your face?

See what your Savior says to the men, **“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”** Jesus’ words may sound harsh at first. But I imagine he spoke to them in a gentle tone. *REPEAT THE TEXT AGAIN.* They had called Jesus a prophet yet were slow to believe his very words. These are words we need to hear. They call us to look at ourselves and see our doubt.

But just as soon as he speaks these necessary words, Jesus gives an explanation to the disciples. He said, **“Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**” Take notice of how Jesus answers their doubts about him. He didn’t begin by revealing himself, but I’m sure that would have been nice. He didn’t give them everything they wanted or were asking for, although I’m sure they would have liked that. Instead, Jesus traced the Scriptures.

I like to muse on just what Jesus told them. Did he start in the garden at the fall? The perfect paradise where Adam and Eve doomed all mankind, but God promised that from Eve’s descendants would come one who would crush the serpent. Maybe he talked about the promise to Abraham, that all nations would be blessed through him and his offspring. I’m almost sure he mentioned David, how God promised that he would establish his throne forever?

You and I could sit here all day and speculate about what Jesus told those two men. But do you see the point? God had a plan. He showed those two men, that in the midst of their doubt and despair, God had a plan. That plan involved sending his only Son to the earth, God himself clothed in flesh, to be tempted in the desert by Satan, but to not give in. In that plan, he endured all the hardships of humanity, yet never once scorned God. In that plan, he allowed himself to be betrayed, humiliated, beaten, whipped, and hung on a cross like a common criminal with nails in his hand and feet. That plan involved him dying... for you. That plan involved him rising ... for you! You see, when random tragedy strikes our lives, we often lose hope. **But Jesus restores our hope through his Word that tells us of God’s plan.** Our confidence is in God’s divine purpose for our lives. A confidence because God designed us to be a part of his kingdom, with sins forgiven by the blood of THE Lamb.

Our narrative continues with the disciples arriving at the village. After inviting Jesus to stay with them for the evening, St. Luke writes, **“When he 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, and he disappeared from their sight.”** Jesus finally showed himself to these two men. Two men who had been lost in a wave of doubt and despair. Two men to whom he had shown God’s great divine plan for the salvation of all people. Notice how they respond, **“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?’”** What struck them wasn’t this miracle. Rather, what struck them was the Word Jesus explained to them! This speaks directly to you and to me. As believers living 2000 years after the day of Jesus’ resurrection, we don’t have the privilege of seeing Jesus. We may not see him, but we meet our Savior face to face every week in Word and Sacrament. We may not see him, but we know he is here, and he is active as our hearts burn within us.

So, now what? What should we do now that doubt is dispelled and hope burns in us? I think the final verses of our text give a fantastic example. **“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.”**

Their immediate response was to go and tell. They didn’t wait until the morning. They didn’t even wait until they had finished their evening meal. But at once, at that very hour, they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what had happened. I like to imagine that they didn’t just take a leisurely walk back, but rather ran that entire 7 miles full of hope and joy.

This is our response too. I’m not asking you to run 7 miles nonstop, I’m not sure I’d be able to do that on a good day. But what I am telling you is that our natural response to the hope with which our Savior, our Jesus, fills us leads us to “run” to tell others. For the troubled college student who sees a world full of options in life but has no direction on where to go. We run to tell him about God’s divine purpose for his life. For that broken and lonely widow, whose life has been completely altered in the face of tragedy. We run to tell her the love of her Savior who breaking through death’s gates has complete power over the grave. Even for the total stranger on the street, who you think would be the last person that would want to hear about Jesus, we run to tell them about the marvelous works of our God. Because the natural reaction of our burning hope is to run and share the story.

I don’t know where you’re at right now. I cannot see into your hearts. But whether life is good, or you feel like you’re in the middle of the most painstaking walk you’ve ever started, your Savior meets you. When you have doubt and despair in misunderstanding, Jesus restores your hope through his Word. And our only response is to go and tell. Amen.