

Third Sunday of Easter

HOPE FOR THE JOURNEY

Luke 24:13-35

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Analysis by Steven Kuhl

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. 18Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' 19He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' 25Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then

enter into his glory?’ 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

DIAGNOSIS: Foolishly Focused on the Chief Priests and Leaders

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis – *“Talking and Discussing” (v. 15)*

If the tragic events that transpired in Jerusalem over the course of “the three days” did anything for those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they generated lots to talk. Unfortunately, that “talk” generated very little understanding. Indeed, the talk left them quite “sad” (v. 17). For the only thing their “talk” revealed was how disappointing Jesus had turned out to be. To all outward appearances, Jesus was a “prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people” (v. 19). Even more, they thought he might be “the one to redeem Israel” (v. 21). But crucifixion at the hands of his enemies seemed to nullify that first impression. However, to make matters more

confusing, “some women of the [their] group” now were saying they saw an angel who said he was risen from the dead (v. 22). As in our own information-saturated world, there was lots of information to talk about but very little to understand.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis – *“Slow of heart to believe”* (v. 25)

Of course, evidence about the truth of the “astounding” message that the angel spoke to the women (namely, that Christ had risen) was walking right alongside these men—indeed, was speaking words of understanding to them—but they were oblivious to it. Therefore, the first thing Jesus does is explain why this information is impossible to understand. Their lack of understanding has nothing to do with the outward information they heard, but with something inside them. They were “slow of heart to believe.” Their hearts were corrupted with false hopes and expectations about themselves and God and the Christ and redemption. False—because such hope had no room for a suffering messiah, even though the very Scriptures they grew up on (the writings of Moses and the prophets) presupposes such a messiah. False—because they believed the word of the “chief priests and their leader” (v. 20) that Jesus was a hoax, a blasphemer, and not the promised (suffering) messiah. False—because they believed the power brokers over God’s suffering-but-rising messiah.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis – *“Foolish”* (v. 25); *“without hope”* (v. 21); *“condemned to death”* (v. 20)

When all is said and done, Jesus says, these two men are nothing but “foolish” (v. 25). By opting to believe the message of “the chief priest and leaders” as the last word of God (the lawful message of God’s condemnation on sinners) and not the reports concerning the condemned Jesus’ resurrection, they themselves as sinners were left “condemned to death”—and justly so. For while the message of the “chief priest and leaders” had truth on its side—the truth that God condemns sin in the flesh—what that

message doesn't have is the truth of Israel's redemption: namely, that the suffering messiah redeems by suffering that condemnation to death. The foolishness of these two men on the road to Emmaus is that they will receive exactly according to their beliefs. They will receive only the things "the Chief Priest and leaders" have to give: condemnation to death.

PROGNOSIS: Understandably Refocused on the Suffering Messiah

Step 4: Initial Prognosis – *"The Messiah should suffer and then enter his glory" (v. 26)*

The events that transpired in Jerusalem over "the three days" were not simply the tragic end of another fine person. Those events were the means by which God redeemed Israel. True, the Chief Priests and leaders knew well the lawful message that God condemns sin in the flesh. Jesus knew that law as well. The Scriptures (both the writings concerning both Moses and the Prophets) were filled with that message. But that's not whole, nor the primary, message of the Scriptures. Moses and the Prophets looked forward to the day when the lawful message would be definitively and historically overruled. The events in Jerusalem were the dawning of that day: "It was necessary that the messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory." Why? Because, in order to redeem sinners Jesus had to confront the lawful message head on-and that's what he did on the cross. On the cross, death and life, judgment and promise, the authority of the chief priests and the authority of Jesus struggled in a most remarkable duel. Which authority would win? For three days it looked as though death, judgment and the authority of the Law championed by the Chief Priests and leaders had won. But, then, came the strange word of the resurrection! The tables were turned, as clearly as they had been turned in the temple. The suffering messiah is the one who has the greater glory: meaning, that in him condemnation is overruled by

forgiveness, death yields to life, sadness is overtaken by joy. A new day had dawned in Israel. The one to redeem Israel is here. Lo and behold, he is a suffering messiah. Who'da guessed it?

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis – *“hearts burning within us” (v. 32)*

Obviously, the two men on the road to Emmaus never would have guessed it. Nor for that matter would any of us. Redemption through the cross was more than our slow hearts (focused on the lawful message of the chief priests and leaders) could fathom. Those hearts needed “burning” (v. 32), they needed turning, they needed transforming, and that is precisely what Jesus also did for those two men on the road to Emmaus. Without burning hearts (that is, a living faith in a suffering messiah) the events of the three days would all be for nothing. They would just be information to talk about but not the truth of redemption believed, sin forgiven, condemnation overruled, and death conquered. Therefore, Jesus appeared to these men as he still continues to appear to us. He appears in preaching (Scripture interpreted so as to point us to the glory of the suffering messiah) and in the meal (the Supper where in he is recognized as the one who has conquered death)-all for the purpose of creating “burning hearts” for what he did for us in his death and resurrection. For a burning heart is a cleansed heart. Or, as Luther put it, “As we believe so we have.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis – *Proclaiming and Praising: “Then they told what had happened” (v. 35)*

The outward life of these two men, as with all Christians, still consists of talk and discussion, but not the sad, confused talk of unbelief. For their speech, too, has been transformed, transformed into proclamation and praise. They now know what to do with the information concerning the events of the three days. They proclaim it just as Christ himself had proclaimed it on the road-as good news for sinners, the redemption of Israel. They

also share the meal with one another which makes their identity as the body of Christ known, just as Christ was made known in the breaking of bread at Emmaus. Even more, not only are they no longer troubled by the messiah's suffering, but they are no longer troubled by the suffering they must endure in his name. They journey in this world in resurrection hope. For they now know the meaning of the cross: "Was it not necessary that the Messiah [and also us, whom he redeemed] to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (v. 26) Of course! It all makes so much sense now.