

Third Sunday of Easter - A (2026)

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

‘Now on that same day two of Jesus’ disciples were going to a village called Emmaus.....and talking with each other about all these things that had happened....they had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.’ In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hope of new possibilities, exciting dreams, and audacious expectations are the core ingredients that pave the way for our vision of the future. At the end of the day, we lay our heads on our pillows and, acknowledging before God the joys and sorrows, the ups and downs, and the things done and left undone during the day, in hopes of a good night’s sleep. Our prayers are laced with hope that illness will be overcome by recovery, that fractured relationships will be restored, and in assurance that God does, in fact, hear our prayers and willingly accompany us on the path that leads to renewal and righteousness. Hope is the fuel that keeps us moving forward and sustains us when we are weary of the journey and uncertain of what lies ahead.

Hope was in short supply or had altogether run out for these two companions on their trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus. For Cleopas and his fellow disciple, the Road to Emmaus was where hopes became like dust, where dreams had been shattered, and expectations unfulfilled. What great hopes and expectations these two and many others had when Jesus, with great fanfare arrived in Jerusalem to the shouts of ‘Hosanna,’ had now suddenly and horrifically come crashing down within a week as the result of political cooperation between the Jewish religious and Roman secular leaders that resulted in the dream-shattering crucifixion of their rabbi on a hill outside the city walls.

“We had hoped,” they said to their new acquaintance on this dusty and agonizing trip, “that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Their flame of hope had become nothing more than a cold ember. Their trip to Emmaus was strewn with the ash of disappointment, and the possibilities for a new dawn of liberty and freedom were now as smoke being carried away by the winds of misfortune, confusion, and disillusionment.

I guess each of us here today has traveled this same road at some point in our lives, this proverbial and hopeless Emmaus Road, where we’ve encountered times of disillusionment, disappointment, and confusion. We’ve all had hopes that were turned upside down and expectations not met. This road of broken dreams and promises is filled with the remnants of hopes for physical recovery, mended relationships, engaging and worthwhile employment opportunities, quests for spiritual renewal, and rewards for hard work, loyalty, and commitment. I suspect some of us have traveled this road and been shaken to the core by the potholes of betrayal, untimely death, and unimaginable grief, events that we had not been expecting. Like these two weary disciples, we too have had hopes and expectations summarily pulled out from under us, which left us depressed and wondering what comes next.

I’ve come to the unscientific conclusion is because we have either unreasonable or misinformed expectations to begin with. Surely the two disciples in today’s story are perfect examples. The folks who were following Jesus, including the inner circle of the twelve, had differing expectations of what and who this itinerant rabbi from Galilee was all about. They had witnessed the healing of the sick, the blind receiving their sight, the exorcism of demons by the sound of his voice, the raising of his dear friend Lazarus from the tomb, the miraculous feeding of thousands with virtually nothing, the submission of nature at his command, and the high regard and acclaim heaped upon him by the many who had heard and seen all that Jesus had done. They saw in and expected that Jesus was the beginning of the end of Roman rule and oppression. They saw, expected, and hoped that in Jesus, their lives would change for the better.

In Jesus, they saw the fulfillment of ancient religious texts. Who wouldn't have been cheering outside the city gates when Jesus showed up on a donkey? Things were about to change, just not in the way many, if not all, expected.

After a tumultuous week, Luke tells us of these two downtrodden and despondent disciples on a trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They're rehashing the events of the past week, trying to wrap their heads around all that had happened. Suddenly, a stranger joins them, who not only wants to know what these two are talking about, but whose questioning results in what I can only imagine is an incredulous, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" They then continue with a brief, but very concise, account of what had taken place, including the astonishing story that the tomb where Jesus had been laid was empty and that some of the women in their group had seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Hopes for the end of Roman oppression had been replaced with an astonishing and unbelievable story of an empty tomb, angels, and Jesus being alive. I think we all appreciate their confusion in dealing with shattered hopes and mind-boggling rumors.

With their narrow, though majestic expectations, Cleopas and his fellow disciple failed to see the truth that is the story of Easter. They had hoped for a military and political king who would release them from their captivity and usher in a new era of freedom. Because of their wrongly understood expectation of what this new kingdom would be like, they failed to see the freedom from captivity of a different sort, the sort that sets one's heart on fire, the sort of freedom that engenders a new depth of hope grounded in a life that has purpose and meaning, the sort of freedom that brings life out of death. Their expectation of God was too small, and it wasn't until Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and shared it that their eyes were opened and their expectations reoriented.

Personally, I am thankful that we and other denominations within the Christian tradition celebrate the Great Fifty Days of Easter. You'll note that we call this Sunday the Third Sunday 'in' Easter, not 'after' Easter. These 50 days allow us to

ruminate on our relationship with the risen Lord. The liturgies of Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday keep us actively engaged with the great Paschal Mystery. Easter Day comes; we celebrate the rising of our Lord and enjoy good food and friendship over meals of ham and scalloped potatoes. Then we tend to return to the routine nature of our lives, including our lives in the church. We need these 50 days so we can explore again and again the very nature of a God who created all things with the sound of his voice, who loved his creation so much that he came to earth as a vulnerable baby, who lived among his fellow citizens, who took on the challenges of the ruling parties of his day, and who willingly out of obedience, took the sin of the world upon himself as he hung on a cross at the Place of the Skull. The Messiah many were seeking could not be the one humiliated on a cross...or could he? The shame of the cross was actually the ultimate sign of victory, a victory the disciples just could not imagine or expect.

The Great Fifty Days of Easter give us opportunities to encounter the risen Lord with new and open eyes. The resurrection of Jesus may seem rather dreamlike, but the 50 days that follow allows us to encounter Christ through the hearing and study of scripture, times of contemplation and prayer, through the breaking of bread and drinking of wine at the Eucharist, in watching the daily movement of the sun from sunrise to sunset, the sight and sounds of birds and creatures, and through moments of being with others in their times of sorrow or joy. The Great Fifty Days of Easter reorient us once again in how we see and relate to God and to evaluate whether Jesus truly is the God of possibilities or whether our lives of faith are too small.

Dear friends, the God we serve and worship is a God filled with possibilities. Our lives are broken open to this reality when we allow God to be God and trust with confidence that our hopes and dreams, while seemingly valid from our perspective, may be far less than what God might have in store for us if we expand our thinking and enlarge our expectations. God will and can do far more than we can ask or imagine if we are open to his desires for us. In our doing, we will be like Cleopas

and his companion, our hearts burning within us, knowing that we have ‘seen the Lord and that he is risen indeed!’