

Sermon – Easter
Sunday April 14, 2020

Hey guys! I'm Jeremy, the Group Life Pastor here at Cornerstone – or am I?

One kid sent me this picture of her Sunday School notes from last week. Check out how she spells my name. Pastor Germy.

It's kind of ironic when we're in this pandemic.

Well, the staff got wind of this and wouldn't let it go. One Youth Pastor at this church, I won't mention his name, hasn't stopped calling me Germy all week... because he's five years old!

Anyway, Pastor Germy is glad you're worshipping with us today on Easter Sunday!

Easter is a time of hope.

- We remember the cross and the empty tomb.
- We declare Jesus' victory over death.
- We celebrate together as a church family.

Easter is a high point for Christians all over the world.

At Cornerstone, we celebrate Easter in a very special way. We have special music, special events and of course, special snacks. Lots of people from the community come out and there's an electric vibe in the place.

My personal highlight is our baptisms. We see them get dunked. We hear their testimonies. We cry tears of joy, we shout our loud Woo-hoos!

We won't be baptizing anyone *this* Easter but we will still worship. So when I say, *He is risen*, I want you to write in the comments, He is risen indeed!

This year, Easter is very different. Normally, we talk about death and suffering on Good Friday. We say, *It's Friday, but Sunday's coming*. Well, it's Sunday today. But it still feels like Friday, or maybe Saturday – who knows... every day feels the same now.

This global pandemic has changed everything. It's changed our workplaces, schools, churches, shopping and families. It's changed the very world we live in.

This pandemic has changed a lot. But one thing it hasn't changed is the hope that we still have in Jesus. Amen?

This pandemic may have surprised a lot of people, but it didn't surprise God. God is still sovereign, Jesus is still King, and he's working even now to bring good out of all this.

But the question many of us are asking this Easter is:

What does hope look like in this global pandemic?

How do we hope

- when people are isolated and anxious?

- when the virus is spreading and people are dying?
- when they say things are going to get much worse and we shouldn't expect this to end anytime soon?

What does hope look like in this global pandemic? It looks like Jesus.

The Apostle Peter says that we have a living hope now through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Pet 1:3).

After the resurrection, Luke, the gospel writer says that Jesus appeared on earth for 40 days. He was teaching people and performing miracles. Luke preserves only three stories from this time, three stories that he believes explain what resurrection hope means better than all the others.

We're going to look at one of those stories today. And to do that, I want to invite you to take a walk with me. You don't have to wear your mask or your gloves. It's going to be a virtual walk. Just make sure you stay 6 feet away from other people.

Today, we're going to join two disciples who are walking on the road that very first Easter. Their story is found in Luke 24.

Earlier that morning, the women had discovered the empty tomb. They had brought spices hoping to prepare Jesus' body for burial. But when they got there, they found the stone rolled away. And there was no body.

Instead, there were two angels. These angels told the women, Jesus has risen! And so the women went to the disciples and told them everything.

Now it's the afternoon. These two disciples have heard this report and they're trying to make sense of everything that's happened.

Bible Passage - Luke 24:13-27

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "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. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 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 all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

25 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Over the past few weeks, you and I have been walking down our own Emmaus Road. We’re just like the disciples.

- We’re going through a traumatic world-changing event.
- We’re grieving our losses.
- We’re processing our fears and worries.
- We’re confused by what’s happening.
- And like the disciples, we’re asking the question, What does hope look like in a time like this?

There’s so much irony in this story. Because when does this story take place? The passage says it’s the third day. What’s significant about the third day?

- The third day is the day Jesus said he’d rise from the dead.
- The third day is the day he defeats death.
- The third day is the day God reconciles creation to himself.

The third day is a day of hope. But on this day, they have no hope.

We had hoped that he was the one....

We had hoped that he would deliver us...

We had hoped that he would make things better...

But instead, Jesus was crucified. Their hopes were crushed.

What about you?

- I had hoped to graduate this year.
- I had hoped to start that new job.
- I had hoped to get married.
- I had hoped to go on that trip.
- I had hoped I wouldn’t be alone.
- I had hoped I could visit my loved ones.
- I had hoped my job was secure.
- I had hoped I would have enough.
- I had hoped my retirement would be different.
- I had hoped life would be better than this.

Like the disciples, many of us are struggling with hope.

What’s also ironic is that even as the disciples are wondering, Where can I find hope? Hope is standing right next to them. Because hope is a person. Hope is Jesus. And he’s with you in your pain. He’s with you in your confusion. He’s with you on your Emmaus Road.

But the disciples can't see that. Luke says, they *were kept from recognizing him*. Why couldn't they recognize Jesus?

Have you ever been kept from recognizing Jesus? Have you ever struggled and wondered, Where is God in all of this? When all along, God is right beside you?

Luke is making a point. The disciples don't recognize Jesus not because he looks different. They don't recognize Jesus because of their spiritual blindness.

These disciples may have gone to church, listened to sermons, sung the songs, been in a small group, invited their friends, served and tithed. But when it comes down to it, they don't understand who Jesus really is.

They think Jesus is going to do great things for them.

- He's going to deliver Israel from their enemies.
- He's going to establish God's kingdom.
- He's going to bless them and make their lives better.

That's how many Jews understood the Messiah. The Messiah, God's anointed one is a figure in the Bible. He was believed to be a mighty warrior who would come and defeat God's enemies.

Even today, many of us still see Jesus that way.

- We want him to deliver us from our trouble.
- We want him to bless us.
- We want him to make our lives work.

The disciples thought that Jesus would make their lives better. So when Jesus died, their hope for a better life died along with him. Because if Jesus was this mighty warrior,

- He should have defeated God's enemies, not die at their hands.
- He should have led them to victory, not leave them alone and confused.

That's why the crucifixion devastated their hope.

They failed to hope because they failed to recognize Jesus.

- They didn't understand who he was.
- They didn't understand what he came to do.
- They didn't understand how he was supposed to do it.

It turns out the disciples had been reading their Bible all wrong. They didn't recognize Jesus because they couldn't accept that suffering was part of God's plan. God doesn't cause suffering; but he uses it to accomplish his purposes.

They thought God's plan was to redeem his people *from* suffering. They never dreamed that it was to redeem his people *through* suffering.

So Jesus sets them straight. **He tells them that he had to suffer.** And he walks them through the whole Bible helping them to see the whole story of God's redemption.

You see, the disciples knew about the Messiah. But there was another biblical figure they didn't know about – the Suffering Servant.

The Bible says that the Suffering Servant will take the suffering of his people upon himself. He will die under its weight. He will rise again to establish God's kingdom.

Jesus isn't just the Messiah who would deliver the people. Jesus is also the Suffering Servant who had to suffer.

Jesus had also warned his disciples that they would have to suffer as well.

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

It turns out that **Our hope isn't that God will redeem us *from* suffering but that he will redeem us *through* suffering.**

Which means that during this pandemic, our hope isn't that all our problems will go away. Of course, we'll do everything we can do.

- We'll pray and stay connected.
- We'll find the help and resources we need.
- We'll help others who need it.

But the truth is, whether we like or not, this pandemic will affect all of us and we can't do much about it. Our hope isn't for our problems to go away. **Our hope is that Jesus is with us in this pandemic and that he'll bring us through this together.**

So how can you hold on to this hope? I'd like to suggest two ways.

First, we **remember that Jesus has gone before us.**

In the book of Hebrews it says:

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

The writer of Hebrews was addressing people facing adversity. He uses the image of a race to describe how to live the Christian life and overcome your challenges.

Last Fall, my daughter Abigail signed up for her first 10K race. It was the Toronto Zoo 10K Run. She didn't think she could do it but I trained with her. When race day came, it was a beautiful day. We lined up at the starting line and when the horn sounded, we were off!

We ran at a good clip throughout the race. But it was unusually hot. And we had trained only during the cooler fall days. We also hadn't anticipated how hilly this run was. And not only that, we didn't realize that the race would end in the Canadian domain of the zoo.

For those of you who know the Zoo, you know that steep hill you need to climb to get there? That's where the race finished.

Near the end, I could see Abby's strength starting to wane, the heat was taking a toll and her resolve was starting to falter. But then she sees it – the finish line! We're almost there, I tell her. You can do it Abby! I'm with you!

And she hears the crowd along the sidelines cheering her on! And from somewhere within her, she finds the strength she didn't know she had. And she sprints that last stretch and crosses the finish line! She did it! Her first 10K in 54 minutes!

The photographer took this picture of us at the finish! It was a great moment for both of us!

How about you? How will you finish the race marked out for you?

- You set your sights on the finish line.
- You fix your eyes on Jesus who finished the race.
- You hear his voice cheering you on, You can do it! I'm with you!
- And you think of that celebration at the end – the high five Jesus will give you when you cross that line.

This is the motivation you need to persevere.

Even when the sun is beating down, even when you have that steep hill to climb, keep going. We're with you!

Remember that Jesus has gone before you. He's already run this race. Think about how much harder it was for him and it will keep you from growing weary and losing heart.

So the first way to hold on to hope is to remember that Jesus has gone before you.

The second way is to remember that **Jesus is with you**.

When Jesus comes alongside the disciples, the passage says that their faces were downcast.

The disciples are sad.

Have you ever been really sad? Have you ever had well-intentioned friends say things or do things that made you feel even worse? Maybe they tell you to just pray and have faith. Maybe they just stay away from you.

But Jesus does neither. He doesn't tell them to pray about it. He doesn't stay away from them. What does he do? **He enters right into their sadness with them.**

This is a theme throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, Joseph goes through tremendous hardships.

- He's sold into slavery.
- He's betrayed by his brothers.
- He's taken from his home.
- He's falsely accused.
- He's thrown into prison.
- He's forgotten and abandoned.

No one could take that kind of suffering right? Joseph is going to fall apart, right? Wrong. Instead he thrives and prospers. How is that possible? The Bible repeats this statement throughout his story:

The LORD was with Joseph.

The Lord was with Joseph in Egypt. The Lord was with Joseph in prison. And that same Lord who was with Joseph is with you now.

Where is God during this pandemic? When you're tired and confused. When you're anxious and overwhelmed. Do you know where God is? He's right beside you, he's walking with you in your journey, he's with you right now on your Emmaus Road.

I like how Christian author Andy Crouch puts it:

The strange heart of [the] Christian faith is that these are not separate realities. Grief and loss go together... with vision and hope... because they are the story of [the] Cross and Resurrection. There is no greater [suffering] than on Calvary, the crucifixion of the very Son of God... There is no greater hope than Easter.

We are burying and saying goodbye to so much these days... But we do not grieve without hope. If we grieve with Jesus, and make room for others to grieve, we can hope to be visited by [Jesus himself]...

Easter affirms that even in a pandemic, Jesus is walking on the road beside you. And he promises to stay close with you in the days ahead.

Our hope isn't for God to redeem us *from* suffering but to redeem us *through* suffering.

And Jesus will be with you every step of the way on your Emmaus Road.