

The D-Word

Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-32

1 Peter 1:3-9 (Series A, 3rd Sunday of Easter) Ps.116:1-3, 10-17

Luke 24:13-35

They stood still, with sad faces. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"

Let us pray:

I am not an English major by a long shot, nor is English my first language, but have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words in our English language begin with the letter **D**? For example: *disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, despair, and death.*

Movie producer Woody Allen once gave a speech at Yale University. He said the following: *"Our civilization stands at the crossroads. Down one road is despondency and despair. Down the other road is total annihilation. I hope we'll take the right road."*

Woody Allen was obviously trying to be funny but his statement reflects the despair and pessimism of our times. *Disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despair, and death* - all of these words sum up how Cleopas and his companion were feeling as they walked up the road toward Emmaus. They were downhearted, confused, afraid, and bewildered over what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth on Good Friday.

The Master they had loved and followed had been horribly put to death – a degrading death on a cross. Only a week before, their *hopes* were fairly high when the excited crowds welcomed Jesus, waving palm branches and shouting, 'hosanna'. But now Jesus lay dead in a sealed tomb.

Their hopes were dashed; the dream was over! They invested three years of their time and resources, and here they were with nothing to show for it. Even the report of the women saying that Christ's tomb was empty didn't raise their spirits; it only confused them even more.

The two *despondent* disciples, walking the road to Emmaus, summed up the situation very neatly when they said, "*We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free!*"

In August 1998, my family and I had just moved to Montreal. I was on my way to Chateauguay to view a house we were interested in, when I witnessed the suicide of a young man on the Mercier Bridge. Traffic had come to a complete halt on the bridge; we sat in our vehicles and watched helplessly as police officers and the young man's mother (we assumed) tried to negotiate with him, before he jumped to his death.

Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers, it's difficult to revive. The reason a number of people take their own life is because *despair* and *discouragement* have sucked the last bit of hope out of their lives.

"*We had hoped ...* ", Cleopas and his friend had said. They were saying, we had high hopes for the future but now those hopes are gone, and all we have left is *disappointment*. Can you identify with the feelings of these two disciples in any way?

For each of us, the cause of feeling down might be different but not many can claim that they have not been affected by any of these **D**-words - *disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, depression, despondency or despair*. I, personally, can identify with all of the **D**-words and even more. I had great expectations when we first moved to Montreal as pastor of St. Ansgar's.

I came, hoping to make a difference, to duplicate my previous ministry. I love my work, and I have given my 200% but, instead of seeing growth, we seem to be holding the line. *Disappointed, yes!* But not *discouraged, not at all.* I hope you are not overwhelmed with the **D-Word** of our ministry.

As the two men walked along, a stranger joined them. This was going to be the most significant walk in their whole lives. The stranger asked them what they were discussing. And so, they poured out their hearts to someone who seemed willing to listen.

They tell the stranger all about their *hopes* and their *disappointments*. The last thing they needed to hear was a brisk '*cheer up*' talk or to be told to "*snap out of it.*" The stranger simply provided a listening ear. As the two men talk of their disappointment, the stranger walks with them. We know that the stranger was Jesus.

Isn't that a great picture – Jesus walking along the road with his *despondent* and confused disciples sharing their troubles? Suddenly, this 2,000-year-old story is brought into the present. When *disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, and despair* fill our lives, Jesus is the unseen "**stranger**" walking alongside us, listening to us, and, if we are willing to hear his voice, revealing himself to us.

As Cleopas and his friend talked about the cross and their sorrow, Jesus reassured them and helped them. How did he do it? He pointed them to what God says in the Scriptures. Luke tells us, "*Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.*" He also referred to Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant of God, *who "was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities"* (Isaiah 53).

It's not that these men hadn't read their Scripture but that their understanding was clouded by the idea that the Messiah would come with glory and power and restore their kingdom. The two disciples could feel the despondency and sorrow they felt in their hearts change into understanding and hope as the "**stranger**" explained that Jesus' death was a part of God's great plan of salvation.

When disillusionment, depression, and defeat dominate our lives, Jesus walks with us just as he walked with the two men on the road to Emmaus. He points us to God's Word of promise in the Bible that tells us again and again that we are dearly loved by God and that he will stand by us through thick and thin. He turns our *despair* into **hope**.

Some years back, I knew a woman who was dying of a brain tumor. She had struggled with the disease for a number of years. She went through surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, and all of the ills associated with the treatments. I asked her how she felt about the whole ordeal. She said that it was very difficult, at times; she knew she was dying but, even so, she felt an astonishing amount of *peace* and *joy*. When I asked her if she was scared of what lay ahead in the future, there was a pause; then, she said, "*Why should I be afraid?* I believe in Jesus, my Saviour. I know where I came from and where I am going."

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, she was comforted by her Saviour. Even though there were times when she was depressed and sad, she knew she wasn't walking alone. God gave her hope for the future; a hope that only the *Resurrection Power* could give. She was blessed, and she felt it - and those who visited her knew it.

The two disciples asked the "***stranger***" to stop with them for the night, and, at the evening meal, he "*took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them.*" Suddenly, it dawned on them who the stranger was; Jesus himself had ministered to them in their sadness.

Despondent hearts had been changed to hearts filled with *hope and renewed faith*. Jesus had revealed himself to them, in his Word and through the breaking of bread. Their world, once again, had come together. They had experienced something of the grace of God.

Because of his love for his despondent disciples, Jesus came and met them on the road to Emmaus. Graciously, he cleared away the fog of confusion; he showed to them the heart of God and his plan of salvation, and, finally, he revealed himself to them. At the moment the "***stranger***" revealed who he was, he vanished from their sight. But he is not gone; he is still visible to those who have the eyes of faith.

I believe the eyes of faith see hope, even in the darkest of clouds. The road to Emmaus is a symbol of the Christian life. This story is about ordinary despair, and ordinary Monday-morning drudgery. It is a story about meeting a stranger, hearing his words of comfort, sitting down at a table, and sharing a meal.

This day and time is perfect to hear the story of the Road to Emmaus again, in our hearts, through our own memory of loss. Feel their confusion, their shock, their sadness. And then, hear and remember the words Jesus tells them, and us.

This story is about the meaning of Easter for us. It enables us to see that the Lord gives hope and joy, when all we see is *disappointment, discouragement, and despair*. It enables us to see our world, not as a place of *death, decay, and defeat* but as a place waiting for God's final victory.

This story about the walk to Emmaus is a story for everyday life in the year 2020. If you are walking the Emmaus road right now, or when you will walk it in the future, with those sad **D-words - disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, and despair** – let us remember we are not walking alone.

When our Emmaus road is filled with *discouragement and despair*, the unseen "**stranger**," the risen Jesus, is walking with us. Walking with Jesus, our road will become a great highway of *companionship, conversation, prayer, belief, and hope*.

**The eyes of faith sees hope even in the darkest of clouds!
And when life dishes out the D-word,
remember you are not alone. Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Thine Is the Glory # 376
- Be Not Afraid # 388
- What a Friend We Have in Jesus # 742

April 26, 2020