



Scott Wagoner

Scott is presently in his thirteenth year as pastoral minister of Deep River Friends Meeting (NCYM-FUM). He is also a certified congregational coach and offers coaching for organizations, congregations, and individuals.

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:1-12*

Today is Easter Sunday! Hallelujah! Today we celebrate the reality that hope and life have broken the grasp of despair and death. We focus less on the empty tomb and more on the reality that Christ is alive and present in all of creation. Each year Easter Sunday invites us to remember that hope and life have the final word. Death and despair may have their moments, but they do not have the final word.

The women enter the tomb and find it empty. The two men in the tomb that “gleamed like lightning” say, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” Why do we look for the living among the dead? We do this when we look for hope in things that cannot offer true hope or life. We spend our energies trying to manufacture hope and life when, in reality, hope is being offered to us through the reality of the resurrection.

When the other apostles heard the news from the women they had a difficult time accepting it, but Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. He wanted to believe it was true. He wanted to know that there was hope. We also want to believe it’s true and that there is hope. We’re tired of the deadness in our world and we hunger for life! This longing for life is God’s gift to us. When this longing connects with a relationship with the risen Christ, we have hope.

Today we celebrate! Christ is alive! Hope, not deadness, has the final word.

*SONG: He Lives*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, may my longing for hope bring me to you.*

—Scott Wagoner

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:13-16*

Today we begin a journey that will take us through the rest of the week. We're going to walk the road to Emmaus. After the death and resurrection of Christ, it was on this road that the lives of two men were transformed. It was on this journey that they encountered both their human condition and the risen Christ. For them it was a physical journey but, for us, it can also be a spiritual journey.

This week, I invite you to participate in this story in a thoughtful and reflective manner. Read it slowly and in small portions. Listen for ways it speaks to your own spiritual journey. Listen for your own questions and confusion and how Jesus would respond to you. How is the living Christ speaking to your condition?

Most importantly, pay attention to how Jesus is coming alongside you and walking with you on this journey. The two people on the way to Emmaus didn't recognize that it was Jesus walking along with them. The Scripture says that "they were kept from recognizing him." Maybe it was their own internal distractions and confusion that kept them from recognizing Jesus walking with them. I know that can be true for me. My inward struggles can distract me from recognizing Jesus in my life.

Jesus doesn't just rise from the dead, he also walks with us along life's journey and in real time. The spiritual journey takes on new life when we recognize his presence with us. How do you recognize Jesus walking alongside you?

*SONG: Open My Eyes, That I May See*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, may I recognize you in my life and circumstances.*

—Scott Wagoner

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:17-24*

We don't go looking for disappointment but it often finds us in the context of life. Disappointments don't have to be crushing but they can be disconcerting if our expectation is that we will never experience them on our spiritual journey. We soon find out that disappointment does happen and even to the most faithful of Christians. People of faith are not exempt from disappointment and disillusionment.

The same is true for our two friends on their way to Emmaus. Their experience of disappointment is so real that it shows in their demeanor. We are told their faces were downcast. Sometimes the experience of disappointment can be such that it is impossible to hide its impact on our life. Our demeanor turns to one of sadness and disillusionment. The most telling description of their souls is in the words, "But we had hoped" (v. 21). Prior to the crucifixion, their hopes had been running high. Now, it all seems like a distant reality.

We probably know that feeling. We know what it's like to say, "But I had hoped...." We had hoped that the doctor's report would have been different. We had hoped that the relationship could have survived. We had hoped that this would have fixed our marriage. Life can have its crushing disappointments and our future takes on a different trajectory.

But our Emmaus journey reminds us that we are not alone. The living Christ is, indeed, alive and meets us at our places of disappointment and disillusionment. These become sacred moments for they reveal to us the living Christ in a transformative way and our hope is restored.

*SONG: My Faith Looks Up to Thee*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, may my disappointments not dampen my hope. I pray for those who have lost hope.*

—Scott Wagoner

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:25-29*

Sometimes I can be slow to understand a joke or a story. I hear it but I don't get it. Maybe someone is trying to communicate a very important point but I'm just not seeing it. I'm slow to understand and comprehend.

It seems that this is somewhat of a perennial problem during Jesus' ministry. Jesus was communicating the reality of God's rule and reign but many were slow to see it and understand. Even the disciples didn't seem to get it the first time around. They too were often slow to understand and slow to trust. Slowness of heart to comprehend the reality of God's purposes seems to be part of the human condition.

We see this with our Emmaus journey. Jesus says to the two, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe." To "believe" is to trust. These two were "slow of heart" to completely trust in the message of Jesus and the purposes of God. It's their slowness of heart to believe that contributes to their confusion and disappointment. I know that to be true for me. How about you? Are you sometimes "slow of heart to believe"?

There is good news. Jesus will wait up for us. When Jesus acted as if he was going farther, the two men asked Jesus to stay with them. So Jesus went and stayed with them at their house. In my slowness, I sometimes ask Jesus to stay with me because I truly want to understand. In his love and grace, Jesus stays with me—and us—so we can comprehend fully the reality of God's purposes. Jesus will go at our pace. This is love.

*SONG: In the Garden*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, help my slowness of heart and my inability to trust.*

—Scott Wagoner

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:30-35*

Sometimes you can just feel the energy of a group. There are other times something truly resonates with you deep in your spirit and there is a sense of energy and aliveness. You can't explain it but you know something is happening deep within. Our souls are stirring and we feel we are on the brink of discovery. Oftentimes, we can look back on our journey and remember moments and experiences that signaled to us something real is happening.

For the two folks heading to Emmaus, their transformative moment converged with a sense of recognition and a deep sense of energy within their souls. The best description of it was that of their "hearts burning within." That moment of transformation came when they recognized the living Christ in their midst. They could then look back and recall earlier moments when their souls were stirring and they felt alive. These are the times we can affirm that the living Christ is always at work in our life and along our journey. These small moments often add up to significant encounters and transformation.

Let our Scripture passage be a reminder to us that the living Christ is always at work in our lives. Along our journey, the living Christ interacts with us and opens up the Scriptures to us. At the right moment and the right time, all of this converges so that we are transformed and we encounter the living Christ in a whole new way. This encounter occurred for our two friends as they sat to share a meal. We are reminded, then, that the most ordinary and mundane of experiences can become moments of encounter and transformation.

*SONG: Spirit of the Living God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, may I know the aliveness of your presence in a transformative way.*

—Scott Wagoner

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:36-44*

We live in turbulent times. Life is changing at a rapid pace and our internal resources to help us cope seem to be strained and overmatched. We also seem to live fearful lives as we are reminded daily of terrorism, disease, catastrophic climate change, and ongoing violence. All of this distracts us and causes us to hide behind the locked doors of our homes and meeting-houses. Added to this is the doubt that sometimes arises regarding Jesus' presence in the world.

But who wants to live this way on a regular basis? Certainly we don't nor does Jesus want us to. For that reason, Jesus comes to his disciples and offers these simple words, "Peace be with you." This is a peace that brings strength and courage to one's soul. It's a peace that is based on the reality of Christ's presence in our midst, not mustered up by willpower and self-determination. It's a peace that is God's gift to us in Jesus.

This peace doesn't wait for us to get it together. It transcends our doubt, confusion, and fear and meets us in those places of chaos. Jesus came to the disciples when they most needed reassurance and encouragement. Jesus enters into our life in moments when we most need reassurance and encouragement as well. Often we don't have to ask. Jesus just shows up and offers us his peace.

Where do you most need Jesus to show up in your life and offer you peace? Where are your doubts and fears most prevalent? It's not about whether Jesus will show up or not; it's about recognizing the presence of Jesus and his peace in those moments we most need it. Christ is alive. Peace is possible. We don't have to be locked in by our doubts and fears.

*SONG: It Is Well with My Soul*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, may I know your peace in my moments of doubt and fear.*

—Scott Wagoner

*BIBLE READING: Luke 24:45-52*

We've come to the end of our journey to Emmaus as well as the gospel of Luke. But we haven't come to the end of our journey with Jesus. That is continual and ongoing. The risen Christ continues to be with us and to offer us his presence in very real ways. Our passage for today suggests two key ways the presence of the risen Christ can influence us.

In our spiritual journey, we can be confident that the risen Christ will open up to us an understanding of the Scriptures that will continually encourage us as well as equip us. Our text tells us that Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Understanding the Scriptures is key to living faithful lives under God's rule and reign. Teachers and preachers can help, but let us never forget that within us all resides our inward Teacher, the living Christ. Christ brings the Scriptures to bear upon our lives in ways that speak directly to our condition. From that experience we are transformed.

In our spiritual journey, we can be confident that the risen Christ will transform us into people of joy (v. 52). Joy is both the birthright and mark of the follower of Jesus. As people of joy, we are able to "walk cheerfully over all the earth" and to live the good news in a way that is attractive and life-giving. Our joy will communicate to the world that Christ is real in our life and that our faith is real. Our joy can be infectious and bring others hope.

*SONG: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Risen Christ, open my heart to the power of Scripture and the presence of joy.*

—Scott Wagoner