

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

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

*They stood still, their faces downcast. 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?"*

*"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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel..." – Luke 24:13-21*

There are few phrases in the English language as painful as "had hoped". Because hope is one of the most powerful things on earth, hope unrealized is equally powerful. It is the shadow of hope, the negative exposure of hope. And if you've ever known an unrealized hope, you know exactly what I mean.

Unrealized hope is socks for Christmas, an extended business trip away from family, a phone that refuses to ring. It is "sorry, not now", and "I've got some bad news", and "sorry, but you're not going anywhere." Unrealized hope is a shelter-in-place order during spring break, a head cold last week, or an extended virus forecasted.

Now sometimes this unrealized hope is because our hope was for something unrealistic to begin with. But all too often, we think our hopes are real and possible, yet they fail us. And these hopes, the ones we can't rationalize away, hurt the most.

Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah, the King who would re-establish David's rule, kick out the Romans and free God's people for the first time since the Assyrian Exile. He should have rode in to town, rallied the Jewish population, and conquered the armies of Rome in Palestine. Few were to die, and those gloriously in battle, and then peace, shalom, for centuries. Instead, Cleopas and his friend walked away from Jerusalem where the Messiah was supposed to have ruled; away from the cross which caused the death not only of their friend and master but their hopes as well. And as they walked, they discussed their unrealized hopes.

Why Jesus hid His identity from them is something of speculation games. But He did, and so they discussed their unrealized hopes with Him, too. And then He did yet another miracle. He renewed their hope. He explained to them, "beginning with Moses" and through the Old Testament, how Jesus had fulfilled prophecy, done exactly what was expected, and died exactly as He should have. And their hearts burned.

Finally, at dinner, Jesus reveals Himself for a moment, and then with a quick smile, He disappeared. And with that, hope was reborn. And as powerful as hope is, as powerful as its shadow of unrealized hope is, hope reborn is the most powerful. And the most contagious. They ran back the 7 miles to Jerusalem to tell every one of their friends about their encounter and their hope reborn. And together, they all fan the flames of their collective hope into a bonfire that set the entire world on fire. Luke's next book, "Acts", shares the story of what that renewed hope did in this world. If you haven't, or haven't in a while, you should read it.

Has COVID-19 dashed your hopes for comfort, safety, and peace?

On what does your hope rest in general?

Have you put and kept your hope in Jesus?

How might you encounter Jesus today so He can fan the embers of your unrealized hopes into the flames of hope reborn?