

Kevin Powell
Easter 3A
Luke 24: 13-25

Two of them were walking that day.

Not running. Not hiding. Not proclaiming anything.

Just walking.

The road stretched out from Jerusalem toward Emmaus, about eleven kilometres or so, long enough for a conversation you don't want to have and can't avoid. Long enough for memory to keep circling back, the way it does when something has broken open inside you.

They had left the city behind, but the city had not left them.

You can tell by the way they talk.

Not in clean sentences. Not in tidy theology. But in fragments. In unfinished thoughts. In that way people speak when something they trusted has come undone.

“We had hoped...”

Not, “We believe.”

Not, “We know.”

Not even, “We still trust.”

“We had hoped...”

It’s a past-tense faith.

And then the line that sits at the centre of the whole story:

“I thought he was the one to redeem Israel.”

You can hear the ache in it. Not just disappointment, but disorientation. Because this wasn’t only about a teacher they admired. This was about everything they had placed their hope in.

“I thought he was the one...”

And now?

Now there is no “one.”

Just a road. Just grief. Just confusion.

And maybe that is where this story becomes less about them and more about us.

Because that sentence

“I thought he was the one”

has a way of showing up in our lives too.

I thought that relationship was the one.

I thought that job was the one.

I thought that church, that leader, that calling, that version of faith was the one.

I thought this would finally make things right.

I thought this would redeem something.

And when it doesn't, we don't just lose the thing.

We lose the story we built around it.

“I thought he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Now, that line carries weight. More than we sometimes let it.

Because “Israel” here is not a vague spiritual idea. It is a people. A history. A covenant. A longing shaped over centuries.

These two are not speaking in abstractions. They are speaking as Jewish people, formed by the promises of their tradition. They are speaking out of a hope that God would act in history to bring justice, restoration, and peace to their people.

And they thought Jesus was the one who would do it.

But what did they mean by “redeem Israel”?

Did they mean overthrow Rome?

Restore political sovereignty?

Rebuild something that looked like power?

We don't know exactly. But we do know this: whatever they expected, the cross did not fit.

The cross looked like failure.

The cross looked like the end.

And so they walk.

And as they walk, a stranger comes near.

That's how the story tells it. Not with fanfare. Not with recognition. Just... a stranger.

Jesus himself draws near, but they do not know him.

There is something almost unbearably tender about that.

Because it suggests that sometimes the presence we most long for is already with us, and we do not have the eyes to see it.

He asks them what they are talking about.

And they stop.

Stopped in their tracks by grief.

“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know what has taken place?”

There's a kind of sharpness there. Maybe even a little anger. Because when something has shattered your world, it feels impossible that anyone could be unaware.

And so they tell him.

About Jesus of Nazareth.

A prophet. Mighty in word and deed.

Handed over. Condemned. Crucified.

And then again, that line:

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Had hoped.

Past tense again.

Something in them has already closed.

And here is where we need to tread carefully.

Because when we hear “redeem Israel,” we might be tempted to translate that into our modern categories too quickly.

Into the modern nation-state of Israel.

Into current geopolitics.

Into headlines and conflicts.

But the “Israel” they speak of is not the same as a modern political entity. It is not reducible to a government or a military or a set of borders.

And it is important to say this clearly:

The modern State of Israel does not represent all of Judaism.

Judaism is a living, diverse, ancient faith tradition. It is not defined by any one government, any one policy, or any one conflict. It carries within it centuries of prayer, struggle, wisdom, and hope that long predates any modern nation-state.

And Christianity itself began as a movement within Judaism.

So when these two say, “We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel,” they are speaking from within that tradition. From within that longing.

And maybe part of their grief is that their hope had become too small.

Too narrow.

Too tied to a particular outcome.

Because Jesus does not correct their longing.

He expands it.

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interprets to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Not dismissing their hope, but deepening it.

Not rejecting Israel, but reframing what redemption means.

And still—they do not recognize him.

Not yet.

Because recognition, in this story, does not come through explanation alone.

It comes at the table.

They arrive in Emmaus. The day is nearly over.

“Stay with us,” they say.

It’s a simple invitation. Almost casual. And yet everything turns on it.

Stay.

And so he does.

He takes bread. Blesses it. Breaks it. Gives it.

And in that moment—
their eyes are opened.

And they know him.

Not on the road of analysis.

But in the act of shared presence.

In the breaking of bread.

And then—he vanishes.

Which feels almost cruel, until you realize:

He doesn't disappear because he is gone.

He disappears because they no longer need to see him the way they thought they did.

Something has shifted.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?”

They had felt something all along.

Even in their confusion.

Even in their grief.

There was a flicker. A warmth. A presence.

They just didn't trust it yet.

And now?

Now the past tense begins to loosen its grip.

“We had hoped...”

But maybe hope is not finished.

Maybe hope just needed to be transformed.

Because the redemption Jesus brings is not what they expected.

It does not centre on domination or control.

It does not arrive through violence.

It does not secure itself through borders or power.

It comes through presence.

Through suffering love.

Through a God who walks unrecognized beside the grieving.

Through a meal shared in the ordinary.

Through a life that refuses to be contained by death.

And that kind of redemption is harder to hold.

Because it cannot be controlled.

It cannot be weaponized.

It cannot be reduced to a program or a policy.

It can only be received.

And maybe that is where this meets us.

Because many of us are carrying our own version of that sentence:

“I thought this was the thing that would redeem my life.”

And it didn't.

Or it hasn't.

And so we walk.

And we talk.

And we replay the story.

And sometimes we don't even realize that something—or someone—is walking with us.

Not fixing it.

Not undoing the past.

But reinterpreting it.

Opening it.

Holding it in a larger story than the one we had imagined.

And then, sometimes, in the most ordinary moment—
a conversation,
a meal,
a pause

something shifts.

Not everything.

But enough.

Enough to say:

Maybe hope is not over.

Maybe I didn't see it clearly before.

Maybe redemption is still unfolding, just not in the way I expected.

And maybe—just maybe—

the one I thought was gone
was never gone at all.

Just unrecognized.

Walking beside me.

All along.

And here:

in bread and cup,
in presence and promise,

Christ meets us again.

Not to give us the redemption we can control.

But to call us into the redemption we can receive.

And it may not look like what we thought.

But it might be deeper.

Wider.

More alive.

May this be so among us.

Amen.