I love this story of these two disciples, Cleopas and his companion. It occurs in only two places, here in Luke’s gospel and a very brief reference in Mark, chapter 16.¹ Once again we are drawn to that Sunday, the day of the resurrection of Jesus, a day of confusion and wonder and finally great joy.

It was sometime on that Sunday afternoon. Cleopas and his companion left Jerusalem through the Western Gate, heading toward the village of Emmaus, about 7 miles away. I am sure that if we were walking along that road, it would be clearly evident that the discussion between these two was very intense.

Not long into their journey to their home, a stranger came up to them, probably overtaking them from behind. "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?" he asked them. They just stopped. They couldn't believe what this stranger was asking. The cruel death of Jesus was the talk of the entire city of Jerusalem, about the only thing you could hear on the streets all day. This execution of Jesus was the final and tragic climax to a whole week of controversies and political intrigue.

But to say “climax” suggests that the matter was ended. And it might have ended except that on that very morning more news had leaked out. Jesus’ body was missing from the tomb. The officials, both of the Jewish religious ruling body known as the Sanhedrin, and of the occupying Roman government, neither one had issued any statements to confirm or deny this news.

And the latest twist were rumors that Jesus was alive. The gossips in and around Jerusalem were having a field day! And here is a man who just walked out of the city and who does not know about all
“You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days,” Cleopas told him.

“What things?” the stranger asked.

And Cleopas let go. The full story of what had occurred just spilled out of him. With what I am sure was genuine anguish and heartbreak, Cleopas said “We had hoped”.

We -- all of us -- had hoped. We had hoped that this Jesus of Nazareth was the one, the Chosen One (Messiah), the Promised One, the one who would come and rescue God’s people. No doubt tears flowed as Cleopas said this.

“We had hoped.” We feel the anguish of Cleopas and his friend. We had hoped.

The stranger who had joined them probably did not comment for a few minutes as they walked in silence. And when he did speak, he said just about the last thing they would have expected. “You are foolish and slow to realize what is true. You should believe everything the prophets said.”

It was almost a rebuke. It surely hurt. But the stranger didn’t stop there. For the next two hours, or so, this stranger took Cleopas and his friend through the entire Bible and explained every reference to God’s Chosen One, known in Hebrew as “Messiah” and in Greek as “Christ”.

“We had hoped” they had said to him. And the hope they had was returning as the stranger explained the Scriptures to them. Could these things be true? And who is this man who is walking along with us? they must have wondered.

When they reached Emmaus, the stranger seemed as if he was going further. But it had been a long day and they were tired from their walk and all they had been through that day. It was time for supper, no
doubt it would be a very simple meal, and these two literally begged the stranger to come into their home and eat with them.

Bread was on the table that evening, as it usually was for every meal. The stranger took the bread and gave thanks for it, broke it into pieces and handed them to the other two, and it was then they knew. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. It was none other than Jesus.

But as soon as they knew him, he was gone. Vanished from their sight. News this great would not wait. With no Facebook to post to their friends, with no cellular coverage to send a text message to blast the news, and with no motorized vehicle to quickly get them back to Jerusalem, they set out on foot -- another two hours of walking, but this time in great joy.

But let's go back for just a moment to what they said earlier. “We had hoped”, they said. This story ends well, of course. Their hope had not been in vain.

But God does not always do that which we expect, does he? Cleopas and others did not expect Jesus to die. That's what confused them. When God chooses to act in ways contrary to our expectations, we are very likely tempted to doubt God and even lose faith. Have you ever been there? Of course you have.

“I had hoped”, you might have said. I had hoped it would turn out this way, but it didn’t. I had hoped for a better result. I had hoped and hoped and hoped.

In the midst of our hoping and times of disappointment, these are not the times to let doubts rule our mind and heart. Just because we can’t see God at the moment does not mean he is not there or that he is not walking with us. God could be in that stranger beside us.

If we can’t see God because of these “we had hoped” moments, then we need to spend some time looking into God’s Word, just as the stranger helped Cleopas and friend to do. It’s all there, Jesus was saying to them, we just need to read it and believe.
“We had hoped.” Let these words resonate with you. Don’t back away from your doubts and your difficulties in believing. It may not turn out as you thought or hoped it would, but realize that you do not always have the full picture, as God does.

Believe the gospel. Know that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. And believe that even out of tragedy God can bring life and hope.

(Go to Communion Table)

Bread, for many centuries, has been a staple in diets all around the world. It was on the table that night in Emmaus. And in keeping with the generous social rules of hospitality, the stranger was invited to give the blessing for the food. And he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Do you suppose it might have been the scars of the wounds in his hands that revealed his true identity? Could it have been that as he passed the bread to them they saw and remembered what had happened to Jesus?

We, too, can know Jesus in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup. This simple sacrament, this visual and outward sign of the grace of God, is a proclamation, Jesus said, a proclamation of his death for you and for me.

One day, we will have this supper with Jesus. A “Messianic banquet” it has been called; also called a “marriage feast”. And what we have taken on faith, what we had hoped for here on earth, will be seen with our very eyes. Even the scars of the wounds he suffered for us will be there still in his hands.

Although we do not believe there is any sort of “magic” in the Lord’s Supper, we do believe it is an important and even essential ritual of our faith. It is a visible and tangible sign to us that God is at work in our lives and that God’s wonderful grace is available to us.
So come to this meal. Whoever you are, come. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, come. Come because the invitation is from Jesus, and he will meet you here.

We are not worthy of this table, none of us is. But we come just the same because Jesus bids us dine with him. And he will become known in the breaking of the bread.

This is my body given for you, he said. This cup is the blood of redemption shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Let us pray:
O God, we come to this table today with imperfect and incomplete faith. Help us in our unbelief, our Father. Help us to know that Your plan for us is perfect and complete. Thank You, O God, for the life of Jesus. Thank You that he was faithful to his calling to suffer and to die for us. And we especially thank You, our Father, that Jesus is alive, and we pray that he will show himself to us as he did at the table in Emmaus. Give us Your Spirit, O God, that we may know You, love You, and serve You, as we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen

(Serve the elements)
The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Let us pray: We thank You, O God, for feeding us at Your table. We thank You that though we are not worthy to come here, Your kind and loving invitation is for all of us. May we go forth to serve You and to love others as You love them. Because of our Saviour Jesus we can pray this: Amen.

I want to express my thanks for two very helpful articles which stimulated my thinking about this text. One is “Cleopas: The Eyes that Are Most Important to Jesus”, by Jon Bloom, Executive Director of Desiring God, the ministry of John Piper, www.desiringgod.org. The other is “Commentary on Luke 24:13-35”, by Richard Swanson (Professor of Religion/Philosophy/Classics at Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S.D.), www.workingpreacher.org (a ministry of Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, MN).

1. Mark 16:12-13: *Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.* (NIV)


5. The normal human walking speed is about 3.1 mph, making the journey of 7 miles just over two hours in length.