

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Easter 3  
April 19, 2026  
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz  
**Let's go for a walk**

—Luke 24:13-35

It was a picture of complete dejection. Sadness. Frustration. Hopelessness. Two disciples on an afternoon walk. They could have easily made it from Jerusalem to Emmaus in a couple hours, but this afternoon it probably took longer. They trudged along in a somber mood. Their world had just come crashing down. All their hopes and dreams—shattered.

Into this sad and melancholy conversation steps a stranger. He seems ignorant about the events that have taken place. How could anyone visiting Jerusalem be so clueless? So the disciples explained that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified. *“We were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel,”* they said. We can hear the sadness in Cleopas' voice, because with Jesus' death, their hopes had died, as well.

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast,” wrote the poet Alexander Pope. To hope is to be human; the human heart is full of hope. Think of how much of your life, your thinking is infused with hope. “I hope my team wins.” “I hope we get home safely.” “I hope your flight is on time.” “I hope I get the job.” “I hope the test isn't too hard.” “I hope I get accepted into college.” “I hope my student loans are manageable.” “I hope the weather is nice for the party.” The list of things we hope for and wait for is endless. What do you hope for? What would life be without aspirations for good outcomes, for better futures? What would life be without hope?

The opposite of hope is hopelessness. The word for hopelessness is “despair.” A person without hope is “desperate”—the word means “hopeless.” Hopeless is a dark place. To have nothing good to look forward to, to have no prospect of brighter days and better tomorrows, is to wallow in gloom and darkness. Finally, that's the dreadful reality of hell—the ultimate lack of hope. In his literary work “Inferno,” Dante describes the gates of hell as having the sign, “Despair all ye who enter here!”

God's Word speaks of hope and offers hope, and in the Bible God takes hope to the next level. When the Bible speaks of “hope,” it's not referring to an empty wish or an unfulfilled dream. The word that's used in the New Testament for hope—ελπις (elpis)—refers to something in the future that is still coming, but because it's based on God and his promises, it is rock-solid and absolutely certain. It's still out there, we can't see it yet, but it is guaranteed.

Let's go for a walk. Let's put ourselves for a moment into the shoes of these two disciples. We know one of them was named Cleopas; we don't know the other. Maybe it was Mrs. Cleopas, Cleopas' wife; Luke doesn't say that both disciples were men. Some traditions speculate that maybe it was Luke himself, the author of this Gospel, who tells us what happened on the road but doesn't mention himself by name. Regardless, it is a somber stroll. These disciples had pinned all their hopes on Jesus; they had great expectations for him. Now it appeared that he was gone. No Jesus, no hope.

It's the same for us and for every human being—whether we realize it or not: No Jesus, no hope. Think about life without Jesus Christ, without the Son of God, without the forgiveness of sins, without the promise of heaven. You can get through life. You can fill your life with short-term hope. Earlier I listed lots of things we hope for on a regular basis—hope for tomorrow, hope for the weekend, hope for your next paycheck, hope for a good outcome, hope for success. But here's the problem: all of those hopes come to an end! When we're young and strong we're filled with hope, great expectations for the future—for family, career, fun, recreation. We're always looking forward to the next great thing that is just around the corner. But as we get a little further down the road of life, we realize that there aren't that many weekends left. We're not just going to bounce back from the next surgery. Hope in this life fades. And then what's left? Without Jesus, there's no hope. There are just memories and nostalgia and yearning for the good ole days and the knowledge that the best is behind you. And when someone you love dies, there's no hope. Without Jesus, it's goodbye forever. You're never going to see them again. So, enjoy the weekend, while you still have weekends. Make the most of life because you only go around once. And when life gets hard, suck it up and deal with it. Put on your stoic face, be resilient, because you are here today and gone tomorrow, and when you're gone, that's it. Lights out, nothing but eternal blackness and annihilation. It is a sad and desperate walk through life, when life itself is hopeless.

Enter the stranger. Cleopas is amazed that the stranger is so ignorant. *“Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”* About Jesus' betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and death? How can you be so clueless? But it becomes obvious very quickly that it's not the stranger who is clueless about what has happened. It's the disciples who are clueless. *“How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”* the stranger says. And then he says, in a manner of speaking, “Let's go for a walk.” Not a walk

along the road. Let's go for a walk through the Scriptures. *Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

That had to be quite the walk! Can you imagine having God's Word opened to you, expounded to you, explained to you, taught to you by the Son of God himself, the Word made flesh? In the Old Testament there are literally hundreds of prophecies that point forward to the coming Messiah, all of them fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Moses and the Prophets tell us that Jesus would be conceived and born of a virgin (Isaiah 7). He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5). He would perform miracles, giving sight to the blind, speech to the mute, strength to the lame (Isaiah 35). He would proclaim the good news of freedom and forgiveness (Isaiah 61). He would be crucified and forsaken by God (Psalm 22). He would bear our sins and carry our iniquities, so that by his righteous death he would justify us and declare us not-guilty (Isaiah 53). He would rise from the dead (Psalm 16). He would ascend into heaven (Psalm 110). And these are just a few of the hundreds of prophecies that Jesus could have pointed to, as he *explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.* That's the whole point of the Scriptures; the whole Bible is about Jesus! Jesus had said to the Jews, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39).

In short, Jesus gives hope! Cleopas' words, "*We were hoping . . .*" turn into burning hearts and living faith and a certain confession: "*We have hope!*"

The shadows lengthen and evening draws near, as the disciples and their companion walk into Emmaus. Their hearts are alive with joy and newfound understanding, but they still don't recognize the stranger. It's going to be dark soon, so they invite him inside. "*Stay with us, for it is evening; the day is almost over.*" And then, as they sit down to eat, and the stranger breaks bread and gives thanks, their eyes are opened, and they recognize that their companion on the road and at the table is none other than Jesus himself, risen from the dead, very much alive, real and in the flesh. But then he disappears, leaving the disciples filled with joy and amazement, saying, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*"

Let's put ourselves into the shoes of these disciples again, because we and those disciples *do* walk in the same shoes. I wonder how many times in my life the Lord Jesus couldn't say to me, "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." I am earthbound and mortal. My heart is caught up in worldly concerns, worries, fears, and frustrations. Isn't it true that you and I get worried and bogged down about many things, things that rob of joy and deprive us of hope? Earthly setbacks, temporal worries, minor hiccups, daily problems with work, with family, with relationships. In the moment they seem huge. But in the big picture they mean nothing. Why? Because we have Jesus walking with us. In the face of today's crisis the Lord tells us, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes" (Romans 8:28). We've got Jesus, who says to his disciples and to us in Luke 12, "Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father has seen fit to give you the kingdom!" (Luke 12:32). All of the troubles and setbacks, all the joys and satisfactions that we experience right now pale in comparison to the big picture—the *eternal* picture—because we have hope!

And when the worst happens, and we come face to face with death itself, when a loved one is taken from us, Scripture says, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, so that you grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thessalonians 4:13,14). Yesterday we had the funeral for Yolie Schoening here at church. It was a serious occasion, but it wasn't a hopeless occasion. It was a time for contemplation and reflection, but there was no inconsolable grief, no despair. Because Yolie was a Christian. She had hope! We are Christians. We have hope! And the words on the cake said it all: "Until we meet again."

Cleopas said on the road, "*We were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel.*" Well, guess what, Cleopas? Jesus of Nazareth *did* redeem Israel, and the rest of the world of sinners. He redeemed you and me from the curse of sin and the sting of death and the condemnation of hell. You put your hope in the right place, Cleopas! Because in Christ, we have redemption the forgiveness of sins through his blood (Ephesians 1:7). Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame! (Romans 10:11).

Let's go for a walk again with these disciples—no, let's go for a sprint! There's no more trudging or shuffling as these two disciples headed back to Jerusalem. They practically ran back to Jerusalem with a spring in their step and joy in their hearts. They had seen Jesus, and Jesus had restored their hope. Let's run with them and share the good news: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.