

We had hoped
Menno Mennonite Church
April 19, 2020: Online Church

Purpose: To reflect the hope of Christ even when we find despair

Message: Jesus comes to us beyond our hope and finds us where we are needed.

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

Synopsis: One of the hardest things that we have to do in our lives, often, is reconciling our hopes to the reality that we see before us. In big and small ways our expectations stay with us in the absence almost more loudly than their presence. Yet even here Jesus comes and is present to us resurrecting up to new life and new hope beyond even what we expect.

[Presence, absence, stillbirth, resurrection | 4 May 2014 | SERMONCRAFT](#)

Memory is a funny thing. What we remember we remember completely whether it actually happened that way or not. Think of how many times you have argued with your friends or family about what happened a long time ago. You remember it one way; they another, and you are both are certain that you are right. So you argue and bicker over whether it is this way or that, knowing full well that neither of you are likely to give in.. We know that our memory is never complete—at least not fully. We all know that we fill in the gaps in our memories, most often to make us look better. We all do this all the time, and most of the time it is harmless at best. Yet we think things happen exactly as we remember, and it can be hard to think that it might not have actually the way we remember it.

But more than what we remember, we also forget. All too easily. All too much. All of the time. Mostly this is just a funny situation where we look absently to the sky while racking our minds to recall the trivial things that have escaped us. Like the name of our third cousin we met only once or who won the Super Bowl last year (You couldn't prove by me if it was even played). Or me trying to remember words in Spanish and making a hash of it on a regular basis. We forget. Sometimes this is good thing. We need to have our memories fade. There are things in life that we need to let go of. If we remembered them with perfect clarity all the time, it would not allow us to live the lives we must.

Even more, we forget that which we never should. We forget who we are, deep down. We forget the important lessons of the spirit. We forget who we are. We forget who God really is. We forget who we are created to be—a beloved people of God, fed by God's hand. We forget that God means it absolutely when God says that we are loved. We forget that there is never any way that God will stop loving us. We forget that we are not just part of club that happens to meet on Sunday mornings, that what happens here and now is more than just performance of ritual, but the coming together of the body of Christ; living, and breathing; assembled in space and time, but reaching the whole world over. We forget all this and so must more all too easily, and we forget it all the time.

We forget because we quickly believe the lies that the we are told each and every day, the cultural assumptions that come to dominate our lives. The lie that you are alone, you are not good enough to be loved, you are too broken to be put back together, that the only way to live is pit one person against the next, returning violence for the violence forced upon us, grabbing what power we can. We believe the lie that is so readily told in America that religion is solely a

matter of personal piety, meant to make us feel nice, but not to mean anything outside these four walls. These lies and so many more like them that have been told ever since the Garden of Eden, and they are just as destructive, just as potent today as they ever were. They keep us from remembering the truth. They keep us recognizing Christ with us, beside us.

The disciples on the Road to Emmaus were remembering. This story from Luke is an Easter story—the same day as the women went to tend Jesus’ body in the tomb. And they were doing what we all do when we lose a friend—they were remembering the things that made that friend special, grieving the loss of all that could have been. We often miss their grief as real as it was because we know how the story ends. Jesus was dead, and that was not going to change. Jesus had been a friend, sure. They were remembering him; they were remembering their expectations of him. Jesus he was more than just a friend. They had thought that Jesus was the fulfillment of all their beliefs, all their hopes. They thought they had found the Messiah. But the Messiah is not supposed to die, and Jesus was dead. That they knew. The story was over, and they could not see any other ending then profound sadness that they were feeling as they walked on the road. Their hopes were something that they were holding on, and their expectations changed what they could see even around them.

In that moment of remembering their expectations, they had forgotten the way God works—beyond hope; beyond death; beyond human understanding; beyond the way things seem to be, all the way to the way things really are in God. They had believed the lie that hope was gone, that hope could die in the first place; that God’s work has failed. And in their forgetting, Jesus was blocked from their sight, even though it was he who walked beside them, explaining everything.

We too remember. We too carry expectations in our lives; of our selves. These are moments where our ability to exercise the power over our lives that we so value has become far more complicated than we could ever imagine. Not only do we need to consider our time, our energy, our resources, but also the very realistic impacts that our activities have on others. We have hopes for these moments, hopes that may need to go unfulfilled at least for the moment. Sometimes, the memories of what we had hoped, what we expect, can block us from seeing that which invites us forward.

That’s why we must come together to remember: to regain our sight; to get beyond what we have forgotten, what has taken us into the lies of our living. We need to remember both in

the intellectual sense of the word, but also in the sense of being re-created; re-membered. We always need to have our self re-created from time to time, because our forgetting tears us apart, and lays us low. The gift of being together, the gift of walking together is that we help each other remember. We help remind ourselves of what really is. What ultimately is. What fully is. We remind each other that hope yet lives, and life yet lives even when we ourselves might struggle at moments to do so.

You have often heard the table of communion being done ‘in memory of me’ just as Jesus instructed. And often times that exactly what we do; we make it a solemn memorial service to be visited and observed, but never lived, leaving it a stuffy remembrance or a cold judgment. Too often our memory is limited only to what happened thousands of years ago and we forget that communion happens all around us all the time, from the potluck celebrating new life to the most common meal of Wonder bread and Bologna. We fail to recall that Jesus meets us each and every day, in the special ritual, and the basic sharing of bread and love and friendship that are with us each day. It is Jesus who comes to every table with us, eating with us and serving us in our every need. What would it be like if we came to the table, every table, looking to meet Jesus, Christ is shown to us, in the breaking of the bread, and the sharing of the gifts that pass between all people? Might we think differently about grace if we really remembered the full grace of God with us? I think our memories would change. Our vision would change. And we would change, because we would be re-membered into something new.

Christ is revealed to us in symbol, and reality. When we come to the table of sharing, we are reminded of what really is. When we acknowledge each other as the gift of love that we all are, we remember what ultimately is. And we regain, however briefly, however faintly, world as it was created to be. As we share with each other out of what we have, Christ is revealed to each of us, in our own way, in our own remembering as we become the body we are called to be.

Not that this is always what happens. We don’t always get it right. We don’t always remember what it is to come to God’s table, what it is to be the body of Christ. I like to tell people that if the church has yet to disappoint you, you simply haven’t been around long enough. Not because I think the church disappointing—not in the least. But I do know the Church is fully human, and humanity will disappoint, because humanity forgets. We have forgotten before, and we will forget again. We will not always be given the sight of Jesus in the breaking of the bread. We do not always realize that it is Jesus who walks with us all the time, in the good

and the bad. Yet we never walk alone. Jesus always walks with us, whether we comprehend it or not, always inviting us to the table, always welcoming us and embracing us, no matter where we are or where we come from. We meet Jesus on the road. For in that meeting our memory is remade, we are remade, bringing about what we proclaim, the Kingdom of God already arrived, still to be fully revealed.

The disciples on the road could not see Christ with them until they came to the table, and had their eyes opened in the breaking of the bread. In the same way, we gathered here become Christ to each other—in witness, in hope, in courage, in companionship, in prayers all sustain each other in ways we can never fully give words to even when we are far apart.

We come to the table of sharing each and every day. We come in anticipation of being met by the Christ who loves us, calls us, and makes us one. May we be reminded again and always of all that we so easily forget, and be formed into new creatures, new people, full of new hope, as we are given new sight of the God revealed as bread is shared, life is shared, and remembering of each one of us as we enjoy the gift that we have been given; being fed; being changed. Being made into the new creatures we are each called to be. May we be given new life as we continue to walk together where the Lord leads.

There's a prayer, an Irish hymn from the 8 century. Christians would sing this song, they would pray this prayer, as a way to open themselves up to Christ, as a way to welcome the Christ who comes to us in the people around us.

Christ be with me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ before me,
Christ beside me,
Christ at my right,
Christ at my left,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ in silence,
Christ in danger,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Prayer of Intercession

(inspired by Luke 24)

You come to us
In unexpected places,
In a crowded room,
In a journey on a dusty road,
In conversation,
In the stillness.
You come in the midst of our doubt, our fear, our sorrow
You come in the power of the resurrection
No pain and suffering is unknown to you.

You bring us peace
And we pray for the places where there is no peace
Countries torn by war
Refugees seeking homes
Prisoners facing torture

You bring peace
Peace to the tensions and conflicts within us
To the regrets, the failure,
The broken relationships
The lost friendships

You bring peace
For you are a friend to us
When we are alone
When we are lonely
Unseen you are there

You bring us peace
And we pray that we too
may become peacemakers.

Our father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
For yours in the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever.
Amen.

A Psalm of Celebration

(loosely inspired by Psalm 118)

Though we have known hardship and pain,
though life has not always turned out as we had hoped,
we will stand here and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

Though life becomes more complex,
the deepest questions remain unanswered,
and the mystery of faith deepens, we will say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

And though the pain of the world
often seems more than we can bear or address,
we will stand firm in our faith and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!