

LENTEN DEVOTION - 2nd April to 5th April (4 Days)

HOPE

A road outside Jerusalem.

APRIL 2nd - TEXT READINGS

Luke 24v13-35

Lamentations 3v1-33

APRIL 3rd - THEMES AND QUESTIONS

So far our movement through Lent has focused on the loneliness of suffering and the togetherness of compassion. Our attention now moves to the question of hope and a road outside Jerusalem.

In **Luke 24v13-35**, two of Jesus' disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus. They shuffle along slowly, their heads down, wide-eyed and in deep thought. Not long ago they had left everything—their families, their jobs, everything—to follow their rabbi, Jesus. They were confident that Jesus had been the one, the Messiah who was to come and restore Israel. They'd seen him heal the lame, give sight to the blind, and set captives free. They'd even seen him raise the dead. And then they saw him die. They saw it and at the same time they felt it, because when he died their hope died with him.

Jesus hadn't been the first would-be Messiah to die at the hands of the Romans. There had been others before him, and there would be others to follow him. The Jewish hope for a military conqueror king who would expel the pagan oppressors and take up God's rightful rule in Jerusalem had floated around for a long time, raising hopes and then dashing them again, and again, and again.

And at just the moment these disciples are trying to sort through the pieces of their shattered hope, an unknown traveler asks a question: ***"What are you talking about?"*** So they unload on him the latest news, the worst news, news about the death of Jesus who had been a great prophet. ***"But we had hoped,"*** they say. ***"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."*** Hope can be a fragile business.

Hope is elusive in the poetry of Lamentations. Chapter three is the only place in the short book where it is mentioned specifically. Chapter three is also animated by a new speaker.

The poem begins ***"I am the geber."*** The roots of the word geber in Hebrew and Aramaic indicate a strong man, a defender of the defenseless. Having been unable to defend those for whom he was responsible, at moments this speaker's words seem full of despair.

In other moments his words seem full of hope, as if he is living moment by moment, thought by thought. Life is full of despair and hope, ache and beauty. Yet in the bitterness of his suffering, he finds the capacity to trust that “The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him” and that “There may yet be hope.” It’s not possible to acknowledge the depth and scope of suffering without exploring what it means to hope.

Questions:

What things do you place your hope in?

How do you think and act when you experience the disappointment of hopes that fall through?

APRIL 4th - REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

Jot down a list of activities or experiences that fill you with hope. It could be anything: a movie, a person, or an activity, like helping someone else or maybe just going for a long walk. What events or experiences fill you with hope? Choose one of the things on your list and go do it. Be thinking about why this particular experience fills you with hope.

PRAYER

“O Spirit of the LORD, rest on us this day, as we ponder the mystery of the vision you hold out to us. It seems impossible that a wolf and a lamb, a leopard and a kid, a calf and a young lion, could be playmates, let alone a child place its hand in an adder’s lair and not be harmed. And yet you call each of us to reconcile whatever lamb and wolf, kid and leopard, lion and calf are represented by aspects of our own personalities, so that we in turn can believe it possible for humans to live in peace with each other in our world. Show us the way of this just rule of your reign in our hearts, that we may be instruments of that reign wherever you send us. We ask this in your name Immanuel, God-with-us. Amen.”

APRIL 5th - A QUESTION

We have meditated on hope in the midst of suffering.

Now consider the following question: How have you experienced suffering, and what impact has it had on hope in your life?