

## **Easter 1: The Hope of Christianity is for Redemption**

### **Luke 24:13-49**

#### **“We Had Hoped He Was the One to Redeem”**

#### **Luke 24:13-43**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

<sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

<sup>19</sup>He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,<sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

<sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

<sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.

<sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

So he went in to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

<sup>32</sup>They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

<sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

<sup>36</sup>While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

<sup>37</sup>They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts

arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” <sup>40</sup>And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

<sup>41</sup>While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”

<sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate in their presence.

### The Sermon

Reflecting on the catastrophic fire at Notre-Dame Cathedral this week, Christopher Caldwell wrote about the effect it had on both believers and non-believers, noting that in France there are, and have been for some time, many more of the latter than the former.

But, citing recent research, he said, “the decline of religion [in France] does not seem to have grounded people in [anything else that’s] more true.” And that, he said, “is partly why the fire at Notre-Dame shook so many to the core. Objects and traditions bound up with religious belief lend a feeling of sense and stability...

“The cathedrals, for all their sacred origins, call to mind a worldly folk saying: The first half of your life, you work for your name; the second half of your life, your name works for you. Over centuries France constructed its monuments. Now [those] monuments construct France. What would it be without them?”

He says, “The bitter truth is that these old things are what is most impressive and special about France, partly because they have been ‘consecrated’ by age but also because *they embody realities that many people regret being cut off from.*”<sup>i</sup>

As that fire was raging, something devastating was happening that for countless human beings meant something deep and profound and unexpectedly powerful.

Thinking about what happens when you feel like you are being “shaken to your core,” when you encounter that which is deep and profound and unexpectedly powerful, we realize how vast God is, and

how tiny we are,

but also how vast our own existence can be;

how mortal and fragile we are,

but also what it means that God has offered us eternal life.

We’re pretty good at making wrecks of our lives and even better at making a wreck of the world. And there are tragedies that are not our fault, and tragedies that are really nobody’s fault.

What do you think God ultimately intends for us, and for the world?

Back in those first, dawning days of Christian belief, after the crucifixion and the resurrection sightings, but before anybody was using the term “Christianity,” its followers simply called it The Way.<sup>ii</sup>

So it’s interesting to me that when these two disciples are talking with each other about what was, at that moment, the predominant traumatic experience of their lives, they are said to be walking on the Way—sometimes translated “road,” but it’s the same word.

Maybe what they have just experienced is what it means to be on the Way, in other words, to be part of Christianity, to be and to do “church,” whatever that means anymore.

The Way, for those disciples, began with the trauma of the cross, and then the disturbing bafflement of the empty tomb;

then having a stranger in their midst but being unable to recognize Jesus in the stranger;

then sharing their amazing story with that stranger, and listening as the stranger shared their story back to them in the context of the whole Bible story, which situates their narrative of loss and confusion in the metanarrative of God and the history of God's interaction with God's people;

and then inviting that stranger in, not because they recognized Jesus—they still didn't—and not because they thought they could get something more out of him, but simply and specifically “because it [was] almost evening and the day [was] now nearly over.”

For *the stranger's* sake, for the sake of *hospitality*, and out of *concern for the other*, they invited him in.

That's called being on the Way. Which is to say: being Christian.

Somehow, your road, your way, has brought you into this service today.

What does the road that has brought you here look like? What do you think God's destination is for you on that road? What do you think God has in mind for all of us, and for the world?

They had watched Jesus feed hungry people.

They had seen him bring hope and healing to whole populations.

They'd heard him teach about astonishing love that, to a previously unheardof degree, puts the onus *on the disciple* to go so far with love that it would explode every convention and leave no “outs,” no exceptions:

Love one another as I have loved you. Love your enemies. Love your neighbor. Be a neighbor. And who is seen to be a true neighbor? The one who shows mercy.

“We had hoped,” they said, “we had hoped that this guy was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

But when he went to the cross, that hope seemed to be shattered.

At that moment, they could have been forgiven for thinking that maybe God really didn't have redemption in mind for creation after all.

God had already made a promise not to do that whole flood thing again, and they had never known God to break promises, “so maybe,” they might have thought, in the aftermath of their teacher having gone to the cross,

maybe the best that could be expected was that someday, when the world had finally collapsed under its own greed and faithlessness and injustice and corruption, God would somehow send some kind of lifeboat, and rescue a faithful remnant by giving them an escape hatch from the earth, and take them away to some heavenly paradise, far away from this lost creation.

But once they had seen and experienced what they had encountered on the Way, where Jesus met them and opened their eyes, they recognized:

God doesn't need to whisk the faithful away from this ruined creation.

God's plan was not to abandon this reality, these people, this world, but to redeem it.

From earliest times—from those who heard Jesus speak, from those who witnessed what he did and how he was, from those who accompanied him on the way, from those who would have known him personally—

they didn't talk in terms of God ultimately throwing all of this away or leaving it behind and making their escape with a God who would turn into Captain Kirk and beam a select few out of here.

They talked in terms of redemption. They *hoped* for redemption.

And they felt and believed it because they understood God's will to be that this very creation—the “noisy confusion of life,” as Max Ehrmann said in *Desiderata*, “with all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,”<sup>iii</sup>—that this very creation, the world we live in now, is worth saving.

What would it take to redeem what needs to be redeemed in this broken and cynical world of people, this fragile earth so abused and polluted, this cosmos with its endless vastness and mystery?

And what is God inviting you to do, and how is God inviting you to participate in being part of the redemption of this world that God loves so much that God sent God's only son?

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<sup>i</sup> Christopher Caldwell, “Why Did Nonbelievers Grieve for Notre-Dame?: Religion goes on, whether or not people honor its traditions” New York Times, April 20, 2019 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/20/opinion/sunday/notre-dame.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>), emphasis added.

<sup>ii</sup> Acts 9:1-2, “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem;” Acts 11:26, “it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians.’” (NRSV)

<sup>iii</sup> Max Ehrmann, “Desiderata,” in Ehrmann, *The Desiderata of Faith* (New York: Crown, 1996).