

Luke 24:13-35

Easter 3; April 30 & May 1, 2017

In the summer of 1941, sixteen-year-old Glen Frazier, depressed that the girl that he loved had found love with someone else, ran away from his home in Alabama. He lied to Army recruiters about his age and signed up to serve in the Philippines, thinking he would be safe from the war raging in Europe. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, everything changed. Frazier became one of 31,000 men under the command of General Douglas MacArthur.

As a child, he had been taught that killing was wrong. When Japanese bombers attacked Manila, Frazier saw a friend killed by a direct hit. He then became a changed man. He no longer had a problem with killing people. He got to a point where he hunted for Japanese soldiers. If he didn't kill a Japanese soldier in a day, he felt he didn't do his job.

The Americans, however, soon became overwhelmed with 50,000 Japanese troops converging on Manila. MacArthur ordered a retreat from Manila to the Bataan Peninsula. Short on supplies and backed into an area that had no escape, the Americans fought off one Japanese attack after another. They kept waiting for reinforcements that MacArthur said were on the way. The help never came.

After about 4 months, Frazier and other surviving Americans were taken prisoner. They endured brutal treatment at the hands of their captors. Finally, he was taken to a slave camp. He was certain that he would die soon. So one day, as he was working on a burial detail at the site of a mass grave, he threw his dog tags into the pit. He didn't want those dog tags to be taken and destroyed by his captors. He was certain that he was going to die shortly. He had lost all hope of being rescued. Confident that his dog tags would be found after the war, he wanted his family to know where he died. When the Allies did retake the site of that mass grave, they found the dog tags of Glen Frazier. The army, now believed that Frazier was dead, notified the family that they had proof that their son was dead. The hope of seeing their son again was gone. But at least his family could now have closure.

Perhaps, his family understood the feeling that these two disciples in our text felt that one Sunday afternoon 2,000 years ago. Everything had been going so well for Jesus and his followers. They had seen Jesus perform many miracles. He raised people from the dead. He healed the sick. He was afraid of no one. When he saw sin in people's lives, he wasn't afraid to confront that sin regardless of who that person was. Yet, he could also speak words of comfort and hope to those who needed it the most. His disciples were willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. They really thought that Jesus was going to return Israel to its glory. Just a week ago, they were part of the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem by laying down palm branches and coats on the road. In a sense, the battle was going so well against Satan and Jesus' enemies.

Then it happened. During the week, it became clear that Jesus was going to die. Perhaps, they had stood on that hillside and watched their Savior die. The Savior that they thought was going to wear a glorious crown was now wearing a crown of thorns. On that awful Friday, they saw a bloody Jesus die a horrific death. Their hopes were dashed. There was nothing more they could do. All they could do was to travel home and pick up their shattered lives. They had given all they could give. There was no more to give. Their hearts were sucked empty of hope. It is then along this road, on Easter Sunday afternoon, that a "stranger" walked up to them with a simple question: **"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"**

They could not believe what this man was asking. Everyone knew what had happened in Jerusalem the last couple of days. Even if you believed in Jesus or not, everyone knew that Jesus had died. Their response was simple: **"we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."** All hope was gone now. Jesus was dead.

Have you ever felt like those two men on that road? They had felt lost and no longer had any purpose in life. They felt crushed and devastated. None of this was making any sense to them. Even though they had heard the reports from the women that Jesus was alive, they didn't believe it. Ever felt like that? They had heard the truth. The evidence of Jesus being alive was slapping them in the face. They wanted to believe it, but they just couldn't. They had heard the words of Jesus, but they really weren't listening very well. They couldn't see the big picture.

What does Jesus do? **“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”** He goes back to Genesis. Step by step he paints the big picture for them. He tells them the “love story” that God had planned for this world. He once again explained to them why Jesus needed to come. Mankind had brought sin into this world. Every person who has been born in this world has transmitted that virus of sin to the next generation. But instead of dropping a bomb on mankind, he created a rescue plan. God’s solution wasn’t to get rid of the opposition they were facing. His plan of action didn’t include restoring the nation of Israel to its prior prosperity. His solution, his restoration of hope, was to remind them that he was and is the solution and that he was the only true source of hope.

Jesus wants you to have that same solution. He wants you to trust that because he lives, you can live. The son of God has washed away the stain of sin in your life. At the baptism font, he rescues us from sin. He has washed you clean, so that you are a child of God. You have been delivered from Satan. You have the assurance of eternal life with Jesus. He has restored hope to you.

There was one person who never lost hope that Glen Frazier had not died in World War 2. Frazier’s father, however, refused to believe it. He said, *“I’m sure if anybody can make it, my son can make it.”* Miraculously, Frazier survived his captivity. The only thing that died that day at that mass grave, was his dog tags. Even though most thought he was dead, he wasn’t. When he returned home to the United States after the war, he called home. His mother answered the phone and promptly fainted when she heard the voice of her son. He was not dead. Dear friends, our Savior is not dead. He has restored your hope. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.