

Easter 3; April 23 & 24, 2023

Luke 24:13-35

Imagine building a life with family, friends and beautiful surroundings. Imagine sending your kids to school each day, knowing they're being raised in a community with strong values, good friendships and unwavering support. Now, imagine that one day you learn all of that will soon end. Not only are you being forced to leave your home, but all traces of your existence there will be erased. It's a nightmare. And it's one that the communities of Flagstaff Village and Dead River Plantation in Maine lived through in the early 1950s.

The Village of Flagstaff, which took its name from the flagpole erected by Benedict Arnold's men during his famous march, drew its first permanent settlers in the early 1800s. Settlers came for the soil of the Dead River floodplain and the area's rich timber resources. The town wasn't a large town, but it had experienced moderate growth. It was a town with good and hard-working people. But then a man named Walter Wyman and his company, Central Maine Power (CMP) entered the picture. He began to purchase small local hydroelectric power companies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, consolidating Maine's electricity production. In order to continue to expand his power production along the Dead River in Maine, he needed a way to better control the flow and increase the volume of the Dear River.

In order to accomplish that he began to look for a place along the river which would be the most ideal place to build a dam to accomplish his goals. He selected the spot – the communities of Flagstaff Village and Dead River Plantation. In 1930, he began to purchase the land in those communities. Once the process of the buying of land started, it became clear that the town would be lost. Some took the money offered by CMP. Some were given the opportunity to move their house to higher land. Unfortunately, some people never came to a monetary agreement with the CMP. There were those who hoped that the project could be stopped. But soon they began to see that any small glimmer of hope was soon gone. Slowly the town march forward to its death. Over the next two decades buildings would be demolished. In 1948 and 1949, the company hired crews to clear the flowage area. During the summer of 1949, smoke engulfed Flagstaff as the crews burned the brush that remained. A year after that, the Long Falls Dam had been completed, its gates shut, and the town of Flagstaff and Dead River Plantation were now underwater. For those who had hoped that their towns could be saved, their hopes were dashed. All was gone. For some, it was the only place they had lived. They loved their town. They had raised their families. But now it was all gone. All hope was gone.

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 may have been part of the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem by laying down palm branches and coats on the road.

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 sitting on a glorious throne 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. Nothing more to hope for. All they could do was to travel home and pick up their shattered lives. They had given all they could give. You can hear it in their words: **"BUT WE HAD HOPED that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."**

When the Central Maine Power (CMP) started buying up the property of Flagstaff Village and Dead River Plantation, they were told that as a dam was going to be built, their towns were going to be gone. In 1950, the flood gates of the Long Falls Dam were closed. Slowly the flood waters rose and swallowed up the two towns. This was no surprise. They had been given years to get out and leave. Yet, I wonder how many people shed tears as they watched their town slowly going under water.

Jesus' death should not have been a surprise for his followers. For thousands of years, God had been preparing the people of this world for the coming of the Messiah. He had given mankind a promise in the Garden of Eden. This Savior would come and crush the head of Satan. He had sent prophet after prophet to remind and show that God was going to

keep his promise. For 33 years, this Savior would walk on this earth. For past 3 years, he was teaching his followers that he was that Savior – a Savior who had come to die. He had tried to prepare his followers for his death. His death should not have been a surprise. When the women and a couple of disciples, it was not like a person who is thrown a surprise birthday party. Jesus didn't step out of the grave on Easter Sunday and should *"Surprise!"* His Resurrection happened just as he said it was going to happen.

These two people walking along this road to Emmaus, were just having the hardest time believing that Jesus was alive – that every single word he had spoken was true. Instead, we see them having hearts filled with doubt. With **"their faces downcast"** they walked along with broken hearts. However, Jesus was going to remove the doubt in their hearts. He sought them out. **"As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"** They gave him a look that said: *How can you not know what just happened in Jerusalem?* What does Jesus do? Luke says: **"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."** He patiently starts from the beginning in the words that Moses wrote in the book of Genesis.

That's the beauty that is found in these words from Luke. Jesus can see hearts that have no hope anymore and fill them with certain hope. That's what Easter does. Easter drives out doubt. Easter makes us sure that there is pardon for our sins. Jesus took God's anger for sin. God forsook his Son. His punishment for sin is finished. Hope is once again restored. Jesus wanted his disciples to see the big picture. He had something bigger planned than just sitting on a throne in an earthly kingdom. He wanted them to see him sitting on a throne in heaven taking care of them for all eternity.

Today, if you were going to try to see where the towns of Flagstaff Village and Dead River Plantation, you would find *Flagstaff Lake* Flagstaff Lake is the 4th largest lake in the State of Maine, is a 20,300-acre lake that captures runoff from 520 square miles of the Upper Dead River Watershed. The completion of the Long Falls Dam in 1950 established Flagstaff Lake's importance for regulating water flow into the Kennebec River Basin. But it is also a beautiful lake where thousands of people enjoy spending time pontoon boating, going swimming, fishing, kayaking or canoeing, standing up paddleboarding or camping on one of the many island's campsites.

God has something much bigger and beautiful for you than a man-made lake. You have a certain hope in Jesus. Live in that hope. Amen.