

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

The Rev. John Judson

“Hope Gone Wild”

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010

[Luke 24:13-35, Isaiah 25:6-9](#)

I was late. I was in fact very late because I could not find my glasses and without my glasses, well let me say, I could not see the broad side of a barn door. And since I drove myself to school I needed them. I had scoured the house looking for them. They were not beside my bed. They were not in the bathroom. They were nowhere to be found. As I was in the process of my hunt my mother spotted me and asked me why I hadn't left for school already. Trying to contain my irritation I told her the obvious, I could not find my glasses. In that moment the look on my mother's face became that look that only mother's can get when they wonder how they could have raised a child like this. Then she said, “John, you have them on.” It took a moment for that to sink in...then I realized that it had not occurred to me that during my hunt, I had actually been able to see the house...and my mother's expression. Have you ever been there? Have you ever searched through the house for something that ended up being in plain sight all along? Well if you have then you know what the two people in our story were about to experience.

The difference however between the men in our story and my search is that the two in the tale had given up searching.

They had given up searching for that for which they had looked their entire lives...God's hope. These two people and all of Judaism, all of God's people had been searching for the hope of God for more than six-hundred years. This hope of God was not a feeling, it was the completely reorienting of the world. It was the establishment of God's kingdom here on earth. This Godly kingdom would be a place of peace, justice and inclusion... meaning even non-Jews would be welcome. It was the kingdom that the prophets had talked about. It was the kingdom that was promised to King David. It was the hope of every faithful Jew. The good news, they thought they had found was that there was one who was bringing in this kingdom...namely Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus had come not only proclaiming this kingdom, but living it out in miracles and acts of power. Finally all they had been seeking was found...but then just as quickly it was lost. This Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified and buried. He was dead as was their hope. So no need to look any longer it was all over.

The amazing thing about the hope of God is that it never stays hidden for long and often turns up where we least expect it. These two men were headed home, to a city called Emmaus. Along the way they were talking about all the strange things that happened and how their hope had been lost. Along the way they encountered a man who at first blush appeared to know nothing of Jesus and his life and death. So they retold the story of all that had happened. Suddenly, and without warning, this same

man who only a moment before had appeared to know nothing, knew everything. And as they walked he began to explain to them how all that had happened to Jesus was not an accident or a set of terrible circumstances but that it had been predicted by the prophets and was part of God's amazing redemptive, kingdom bringing plan. By the time the trio arrived in Emmaus we can almost imagine that the hope of God for which they had stopped looking was beginning to call to them again...they could almost catch a glimpse of it right around the corner. It was not going to stay hidden. And it would only be a few more minutes before it leaped out and overwhelmed them.

What happened next is still one of the great and amazing stories of the scriptures. When the men arrived in Emmaus they invited the stranger to have dinner with them. During the meal, the stranger picked up the bread, blessed it and broke it. In that moment the men realized that their fellow traveler was not stranger but was Jesus himself...the crucified one risen from the grave. Jesus had in fact been with them the whole time. I am not here to try and explain the physics of this event, but simply to affirm that those two people encountered the living Christ raised from the dead. This was no ghost. This was a flesh and blood, risen man. And in that moment the hope of God that was lost was found. These men could not wait for morning to come, but even while it was still dark they ran to find the other disciples and proclaim that Peter and the women were right. Jesus was alive. This was hope gone wild.

My guess is that it is hard for us to comprehend what powerful hope this moment offered to the disciples. We have heard this story so many times that it is hard to get really, really excited. But the fact of Jesus' resurrection ignited a firestorm of hope which swept first to Jerusalem and then around the world. This was hope gone wild because it meant Caesar lost and God won. Caesar, the oppressor of God's people claimed to be a god and used his power to oppress and humiliate millions. It was Caesar's power that had put Jesus on the cross and declared him dead and defeated. But the God of hope had other ideas. God raised Jesus from the dead, thus defeating all of Caesar's plans and declaring once and for all that the Kingdom of God had come into the world and no one...not even the most powerful emperor in the world could stop it. It meant that life won and death lost. The ultimate power in the world had been death. It was a power used by oppressors to keep people in line. It was the power most feared. When God raised Jesus death lost. Death no longer held away because new life, resurrection life was at hand. This was the hope for which the people had been waiting...this was hope gone wild.

For you and I the hope of God continues. And the hope is not simply that death has been defeated and life wins. It is also that the power of God and God's here and coming kingdom have been unleashed on the world. It means that the power of God is present within us, individually and as a community, in order that

this world be made the kind of place God would have it to be. It means that all the bad news...economic difficulties, wars, famines, earthquakes and all the rest are not the final word. They are not the end of the story. The end of the story is that God has been and will be victorious and what is ahead is God's final victory. So this morning let's celebrate...let's celebrate hope gone wild in the love and power of God let loose in the world.