

**Sermon for Sunday, April 30, 2017**  
**St James Episcopal Church, St James NY**  
**Rachel Marie Stone**

Two friends trudge slowly home, their arms and legs heavy with sadness  
They've got that deflated, cold, leaden feeling you get  
When something you'd been hoping for and believing in turns out the wrong way.

When Jesus was alive, they were sure that he would be the one to redeem their people;  
To set them free from the tyranny of foreign occupiers  
To restore the kingdom to their people and fulfill God's ancient promise.  
But Jesus has died, and with him, all their hopes.  
It is hard to imagine a scenario sadder than this:  
They have not merely lost a friend and beloved teacher;  
They have lost all hope for their people; their nation.

Imagine you have been stranded in the middle of a great, wide wilderness -- a DESERT --  
a place where there were no phones

And no other people.

(It is harder to imagine this on Long Island, but let's try anyway --)

Imagine you had been promised that sometime during the day, a bus would stop  
And rescue you. Your eyes and neck would have strained, looking for that bus  
You would have been filled with joy when it came rolling up to you.

But let us say that the bus arrived only to break down --  
the very moment you climbed in and sat down.

It's done. This bus isn't taking you anywhere. It's over, or so you think.

You would feel devastated, maybe even ashamed of the anticipation and joy and the  
cheers with which you had greeted the bus.

It's something like this for these friends on the road to Emmaus, only, of course,  
much, much more serious.

For hundreds of years, the people of Israel had been waiting and hoping for the One --  
The One God had promised --

The Prophet, who would be mighty in word and mighty in deed  
Who would redeem the nation of Israel from her captivity;  
Her foreign occupation.

Then he came, doing and saying all the things that the prophets said he would do:  
Healing the sick, feeding the hungry, proclaiming good news to the poor,  
Making waters break forth in the desert  
Making the desert blossom.

Bringing peace and justice just like the vision the prophet Isaiah gave:

“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
and come to Zion [that is, to Jerusalem] with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

This is what they were hoping for. This is what they thought Jesus was bringing.  
Yet here they are: in sadness and sighing instead of joy and gladness  
The supposed Messiah? Was dead, and their hopes were dead, too.  
And this is what the friends talked about they walked along the road.

And as they walked, a stranger appeared.

“Hi there!” the stranger says. “What have you two been talking about?”  
The friends look at one another, eyebrows arched, then peer at the stranger sidelong,  
Clearly thinking that there’s something a little “off” about this one,  
Because for three days, the only thing that anyone has been able to talk about is this:  
That Jesus, the one that they’d hoped was the Messiah  
The one they hoped would bring that peace and joy to Israel  
Was now dead.  
If there were newspapers, this would have been the cover story on every single one.  
If there was cable TV, every channel would be running commentary on this.  
If there was Facebook and Twitter, all the trending topics would be related to this.  
What else would they have been talking about?

“Are you the only one who doesn’t know what has been going on around here recently?”  
they ask  
Incredulous that it’s even possible that he doesn’t know what  
Everyone’s been talking about.  
Of course, this is a bit of humorous irony if you think about it:  
“Are you the only one who doesn’t know” --  
-- since he, of all people, does know,  
Is the only one who really knows.  
He doesn’t let on, though:  
“Tell me,” says the stranger.

They tell him: Jesus—the prophet who was so powerful  
who healed the sick  
Cast out demons

Raised the dead  
 gave sight to people who were blind  
 fed thousands of people with just five small loaves and two fish,  
 And who preached the good news of the kingdom of God—is dead.

“We had hoped that he would be the one to redeem us,” they say,  
 “but now he has been dead for three days.  
 Even worse, now there are odd stories about his tomb being empty,  
 and women seeing visions of angels telling them that Jesus is alive again.”

“Well,” said the stranger, “don’t you realize that all of your Scriptures  
 (what we now call the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible) say that the Messiah,  
 the one to redeem Israel, would have to first suffer and then enter into glory?”

The fact that Jesus died shouldn’t have been unexpected.  
 The Bible that they’d had all along, for thousands of years,  
 told them that this would happen.  
 Far from proving that Jesus wasn’t the Messiah, the hoped-for rescuer,  
 Jesus’ death showed that he really was the Messiah.  
 The Messiah—Jesus—had to suffer and to die.  
 Their scripture said this, the stranger said.

What’s more, these devout Jews also believed in the resurrection of the dead  
 But that was something to happen at the end of time, certainly,  
 Not something to happen NOW.

Well, but even after all this,  
 They still did not recognize the stranger,  
 But they must have wanted to hear more,  
 Because they invite him to stay with them.

And when the stranger takes bread,  
 Gives thanks for it  
 And breaks it,  
 They suddenly realize -- this stranger is Jesus!  
 Jesus, who preached the good news of the kingdom of God,  
 Who gave sight to the blind and raised the dead and cast out demons and  
 healed the sick.  
 Who fed thousands with just five small loaves and two fish,  
 Now broke bread for them,

And their eyes were opened.

Just talking \*about\* Jesus didn't seem to calm their fears and their worries --  
 Didn't penetrate their understanding  
 But when they took and ate the bread that Jesus offered,  
 They suddenly understood everything that he had been telling them.  
 They were blind, but now they could see.  
 It was like a miracle.  
 Then, as soon as they could see him for who he really was  
 He was gone.

But in a way, he was not really gone.  
 Once the friends came to understand that Jesus is not dead at all  
 They realize that he still is the one who has come to redeem all people.  
 His resurrection in the middle of time standing as a promise of what will be  
 At the end of time.  
 And once they hear this news, the friends cannot remain where they are.  
 Though they have been traveling for much of the day,  
 They immediately return to Jerusalem to tell everyone who will listen what has  
 happened:  
 Yes, Jesus died, but Jesus is risen!  
 We recognized him when he broke bread, and shared it with us.

This story reveals to us something about the Eucharistic feast --  
 We eat the bread and drink the wine together and remember  
 That Christ died for us  
 And that we are members of his body  
 And therefore, heirs, with him, in hope --  
 In hope of that eternal Kingdom of God  
 Where justice rolls down like a mighty river  
 And righteousness like an ever flowing stream --  
 Making the desert bloom.  
 This vision of the prophets is no broken promise --  
 It is the Christian hope:  
 The promise that God will make all things new.  
 And God has given us an early taste of what that "newness" will be:  
 Sick people healed, hungry people fed, joyful weddings, overflowing with wine  
 The dead called forth from the tomb to new and unending life.

This story reveals something to us about the nature of Christian hope:

It is not a surprise -- or shouldn't be -- when we face adversity and death,  
 Just as it wasn't a surprise -- or shouldn't have been -- when the Messiah  
 Suffered and died.

"In the midst of life we are in death," the prayer book says,  
 And the Bible gives us many stories that help us understand the human condition.  
 We should not be surprised when life is hard.

"Life IS pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something,"  
 Goes a line from the movie "The Princess Bride."

True enough.

And yet the Christian story tells us that pain and death are not the end of the story --  
 That even the worst "bad thing," death, is not the end.

Jesus has conquered it.

In the middle of time, Jesus showed us what he will do at the end of time.

And that is why we strive to live as kingdom people --

People who try to make the vision of the prophets and of Jesus' prophetic ministry real.

People who work for justice and peace

Who feed the hungry and alleviate suffering and strive to make every kind of "desert" --  
 food deserts, deserts of learning, deserts of hopelessness --

Bloom.

People who declare boldly that death is not the end

People who put our faith in a Messiah who is not dead

But who conquered death, and lives.

The resurrection is the really the reason that,

Thousands of years later

We are still telling the story of Jesus

Just as the two friends rushed back to tell everyone what they had learned,

We are still telling the story of Jesus.

The story that says, "hope lives":

Hope lives, because

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

This is what we believe.

Alleluia.