

²⁰²⁰Easter₃ – April 26. What do you do when...? Your plans fall through. Luke 24:13-35

Think for a moment of what you had planned before Covid19 hit. What's been canceled for you? What's been lost? How much has had to be changed?

Spring sports. Graduation ceremonies. Gatherings and celebrations. Travel. Vacations. We had things planned. | Appointments. Some less urgent, though even some of those you and I might debate. If hair coloring appointments at salons don't happen for a while, what's the harm? Maybe people will finally know what color hair we're each born with or that we've aged into gracefully. Of course, even if we can't agree on how critical that issue is, on the other end of those same canceled appointments we'd all acknowledge: there's life-impacting effects. Hairstylists have been without their regular work and income. Many other individuals, employees and businesses, face the same.

As a church we had plans. We had a target set for the end of June as a "substantial completion" date for our new building. Now, is a completion by the end of the year possible? We'll see. Who knows.

What do you do when things like this happen? When what was planned falls through, and you're left picking up the pieces - searching for answers. Individually, as families, as a church family, we had things planned. They were in our calendars. And such plans are more than insignificant scratchings on paper. We're talking about expectations for our future, hopes for our lives.

Suddenly so many of the things we had all figured out – set in place, just so – have been overturned.

To put a mental image to it... Covid19 has done to our plans what a young child does when they come to the scene of a block building which you've carefully constructed. You know what I mean! In an instant the thought and the time, your planning and your effort to get everything in a fitting place, are all undone. And the pieces are strewn in a big mess. Scattered. Disorganized. Maybe a part is even broken or lost.

How do you feel? If you were *really invested* in that building (can you put your-self into that mindset? you had big plans for it), how do you feel seeing it upended?

Getting further in to the dilemma you're now faced with: what's your next step? There's the possibility you're feeling disbelief. And while feelings like that at a time like that are to be expected, you don't want to get stuck there. Say you move on from that, or you jump straight to feeling frustration, maybe even anger. Your age and understanding might determine your level of this: from mild irritation to extreme aggravation. Regardless... you don't want to get stuck stewing in frustration or anger.

So what do you do? What now? You've got blocks still. You've got your abilities. It'll take time. But you've got that too. This is certainly not how you had planned to spend this time. And things might look different in the end. But the pieces can be picked up, put together.

These 2 followers of Jesus, in Luke ch.24, had pieces. The problem was: they didn't see how they fit together. [slide, pieces of puzzle]

For this, though, for what they are puzzling over, it isn't a case where all sorts of combinations will work. It isn't like building blocks where you take the pieces and come up with whatever looks good to you. No. Here there is only one way the pieces fit. They combine to form one message. And that message is the key and source for providing: forgiveness of sins, peace with God, certain hope which will never disappoint, life eternal. | They were looking for the fulfillment of God sending the Promised Savior.

These 2 had thought – at one time – that they had all the pieces in place. They were hoping for the Lord's promises to be fulfilled in Jesus – by Jesus. They thought they knew what God was up to – how He was going about things. That was before Jesus' death on Friday. Now it was Sunday. And to them, as they walked away from Jerusalem, all the pieces seemed hopelessly scattered. This wasn't what *they* had expected. They didn't understand.

Hear their words, as they grasp at the pieces:

“...Jesus of Nazareth... mighty in deed and word ...our rulers handed him over... they crucified him. ...we *were* hoping that he was going to redeem Israel. ...*however*, it is now the third day... Some of the women said... angels said that he was alive. ...*but* those who *were with us* did not see him.”

Picture them, standing on the road, but hunched over memories from these last days, picking up this and that, trying to make the information all fit, shaking their heads. “There must be an answer! There is, isn’t there?”

Along comes Jesus. And He shows them – not His identity, not right away anyways. What does He show them first? He goes on first to show them how the pieces all fit together.

And how does He do that? He takes them to the Word. This [the Bible].

- “The Word of God is living and active” (Hebrews 4:12). The Word is life-giving (John 6:63,68). It revives the soul and gives understanding (Psalm 19:7-8; 119:130).

This is the most important element in answering our question that we’re answering today, “What do you do when... you’re confused and searching for answers?” Where do you turn when your expectations have been upended, and you are trying to fit the pieces together?

Take a look back again to Jesus with the 2 disciples.

It’s like someone coming on the scene of 2 people trying to puzzle through and assemble a jigsaw puzzle. And they are obviously not getting it. And the person who walks up, picks up the box top sitting off to the side, and says: “Aren’t you going to use this? You’re trying to look at the pieces without the solution given to you from the creator of it all. Remember this. It shows how each piece has a place in the design (and they arrive at a beautiful outcome).”

What is it that Jesus holds up as their guide for piecing together all the events that just took place in Jerusalem? “Look right here [pointing to the Bible].”

Jesus says, “How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter his glory?” vs.25-26.

Jesus’ words of correction come with great love but also a healthy dose of firmness and directness. He cuts to the heart of their problem. They were slow to hear and believe the truths God had put down in writing, in His Word.

It’s not very hard to see how Jesus’ words apply to you and me too. When have you been slow to hear and believe the very words of God? What gets in your way: your *wants*, your *ideas* of the way things should be, your emotions if things don’t turn out as you *hoped* or *expected*?

If we don’t have the comforts that we get accustomed to and expect in life, do we become disappointed with God? If you don’t get the enjoyment in life - from work or in family or through relationships - which you have your heart set on, do you become dissatisfied? Take a moment. Think of the ways you’ve let wants, or emotions, or faulty expectations interfere with your sight to God’s care and interfere with your hearing & trusting God’s Word. | Here too, today, are frail and faulty disciples of Jesus, foolish many times... slow of heart.

The answer for us? Jesus is. Jesus teaches us, like He did on the first day back from death. That’s what happens through His Word, right here [the Bible]. He uses it to correct our errors, to bring us to repentance for our sins, to strengthen and renew our faith in Him.

Look back and see how...

As if holding up a photo of the puzzle and going on to say, “Here, let me show you!” ... Jesus picks up piece after piece of God’s Old Testament Word and lines them up for the 2 disciples, in order to show the fulfillment in His life, death and resurrection. All completed now. Jesus teaches them, and us, how this whole “fitting together the pieces” works. “...beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

We heard in John's Gospel, read last Sunday: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

Everything God has ever said is true. Every promise is kept. This Word, right here, is certain. It is truth. And so is Jesus. He is truth. His promise to rise is confirmed this day. He is alive. And every blessing He has promised us is just as confirmed / certain. This is His gift to us. All who are in Him - namely, who trust Him – have His eternal blessings.

And knowing that truth is the way to have an answer for when faced with times in life like we are in right now. Plans we had in place have fallen through, expectations have gotten upended and hopes for important parts of our lives have dissolved away. It would be naïve – not to mention insensitive – to ignore the feelings of pain and loss that come in such times. Acknowledging this, and not denying it, brings us to appreciate and treasure all the more what Jesus teaches us today.

In the midst of all of the disappointment and loss and upheaval which you experience in life, in Jesus you have a foundation for your life that remains unmovable and undisturbed. For Jesus remains. He remains with you. He is risen, living, present every day. | He is using His power and acting in love – always – for your good. Through faith in Him, you have all that He lived and died and rose to bring: forgiveness of sins, peace with God and eternal life. You have heaven at the end of life's road.

It's these building blocks, set and established in your heart by the Holy Spirit, that form the foundation for your life.

Then, you come to change, and you are assured: "In this too, Jesus is with me. Never will He leave me. And so, I'm ok still."

Then you come to loss, and you know: "In this too, Jesus is with me. I'm not lacking anything I need. He will make sure of that. And so, I have peace still."

Still, still, still, in this world's troubles, when your plans fall through, your God's good plans for you and care of you remain. God is still in control. He holds everything together: our world and our lives. In the midst of all the events of life He works for your eternal good. How do you know? He promises so (Romans 8:28; Jeremiah 29:11). And Jesus' death and resurrection is the ultimate proof: He keeps all His promises. Rest in Him, and keep on resting secure in Him as you hear Him in His Word. Amen.

Children's lesson – Sermon extension

We asked earlier what's been canceled, what's been lost since we've had to "stay at home." And there's a lot. You, children, are at your homes. You maybe haven't seen your friends for a while. That's a change. You might miss some activities and some people. You may be sad at times, because of that.

In the midst of all of it, God is with you. Jesus is taking care of you. He still blesses you and me in so many ways – above all with the only things that last. He gives us forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

Let's do something together, in order to get one more reminder of this truth.

As I get ready here, one type of business that is suddenly booming in the midst of this "stay at home" time is the maker of a "toy & game" item. Got a guess at the item? (There's probably others. But...) Jigsaw puzzles. The increase in sales began in early March. What else was happening right then? School closures. "Quick!" Right? "Find something to do in our homes for hours on end."

Ok, we're ready...

- send this out to parents, for use after: activity to cut up, children put together, for during and after.

On this side we have a Bible cover. This is God's truth we carry with us through each day. On this side we have a map of our area. This represents our world, what happens in our lives each day. Let's take off the Bible cover, so that it doesn't get disturbed here as we... Cut up the paper map and make it into a puzzle.

- secret still: Jesus is on the other side.

Now... The world seems all mixed up sometimes, and with it things in our lives. We may be left puzzling over how everything fits – it's hard to see. "God must have a plan. Everything must be ok, right? Even though it might seem sometimes like it's all just a big mess, it's not. Right?" Yes! Everything's ok. God's got you. And the way we have that certainty is by... returning to God's Word. Let's flip over the pieces of the map. (Start puzzling into place.) Remember, God's Word was what the other side of our paper was showing. And what do you see here? Give us a second here. (this side shows Jesus; tape pieces together)

Let this - Jesus alive - be the answer, the assurance for when things seem bad, or when something makes you sad. Our God is still in control. (flip to map) He holds everything together: our world and our lives. The Lord Jesus will always take care of you. How do you know? He promises so. (flip to Jesus' side) And Jesus' death and resurrection is the ultimate proof: He keeps all His promises. Always trust Him. Amen.