

Introduction

She dropped her 34-year-old husband, Michael Goldsmith, sick with the coronavirus, off at a New Jersey emergency room three weeks prior and didn't see him since. Living through a nightmare, his daughter laments, "He used to snuggle with me, and now he can't." His wife sees the urgency, "We need him to wake up, because at this point in time we're really living minute by minute." Denied one experimental drug, he was improving slightly on another. Experimental treatments can only promise so much to struggling, confused families. As the uncertainty over this pandemic has stretched on and on, the false hope, the shallow understanding, the grieving hearts have flatlined and need to be revived. Families are pleading with their loved ones, "I don't want you to leave! Stay with me!" As the uncertainty over Jesus' last days stretched on and on, the false hope, the shallow understanding, the grieving hearts have flatlined and need to be revived. In today's Gospel, we plead, "I don't want you to leave!"

Stay with Me, Jesus!

to revive my false hope ... to revive my shallow understanding ... to revive my grieving heart

To Revive My False Hope

"Don't you see, Cleopas, we have plenty to talk about on this seven mile walk back home to Emmaus. How can you not? How clueless must a person be to not know what's going on! It's like the coronavirus – all over the news! Every person you meet is talking about this guy named Jesus. What a man he was! ***He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.*** He spoke like none of our religious leaders spoke; he spoke with conviction and authority. He healed the sick; he fed the masses; he confronted the status quo. He might just be the M-word, the Messiah. He might be the guy we had pinned our hopes on. ***We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*** He was going to kick those Romans out of Jerusalem and send them back where they belong! He was going to liberate us from foreign oppression. He was going to give dignity to our lives again. He was going to bring us back to the good ol'-days, the days of David, when our nation was prosperous, successful, and famous. But then it all went downhill this past week. Once he arrived in Jerusalem, the chief priests and our rulers placed a target on his back. It didn't matter throngs of people packed the city during the Passover festival. They had it out for him to get rid of him once and for all. First, a death sentence. Then, a crucifixion. Once the ropes lifted that cross from the ground, our hopes came crashing down! How could he deliver us when he can't even deliver himself! Now we feel like fools. All our hopes pinned on the wrong guy. We even feel like fools entertaining this crazy report from the women this morning. They claimed they saw some sort of vision of angels, but who knows what really happened? Maybe they were just dreaming. After all, no one's seen his body. Without him around, all our hopes and dreams for deliverance gone!"

Have you felt like that recently? Has your hope in God seemed to be proven false? He's healed the sick, but he can't seem to do anything about the thousands sick in hospitals right now! He's supposed to give us a better life, but our lives have just been going rapidly downhill these last few days! He's allegedly our deliverer, but my life has only gotten worse! I have pinned all my hopes on this Jesus guy, and he's turned out to be a massive disappointment! What went so wrong with Cleopas, and what has gone wrong with us today? In both cases, we think that

simply because Jesus doesn't conform to *our* hopes, we think *all* hope is lost. In other words, Jesus has to provide hope only in the way we can fathom. Here's the irony. Jesus is our great deliverer, just not from the things we expect. He is a much greater deliverer than we could ever fathom! Not just a deliverer from the carnage of the emperor of the Mediterranean world but a deliverer from the carnage of the emperor of sin. Not a deliverer who would flex his political muscle but one who would break the bonds of Satan. Not just a deliverer of the Israelite nation but a deliverer of the whole world. Not just a deliverer who promises to breathe physical life into your lungs through a ventilator but to breathe spiritual life into your souls. Don't we need someone to revive our false hope? Stay with me, Jesus!

To Revive My Shallow Understanding

"Don't you see, Cleopas, I need to walk with you too these seven miles back home? That's why I came to join you unawares. For the past mile or two I've heard you talk on and on about this Jesus guy, but your understanding of him is far too shallow! ***How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*** You're so surprised and crushed at what happened these last few days, but you should have seen this coming. Your focus is all off. Stop thinking about politics. Stop thinking about the crazy women. Start going back to the Scriptures. This grand plan of redemption has been unfolding from the very beginning. Let me walk you through it, from start to finish. On the first pages of Scripture, God revealed the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Ge 3:15). Then God promised Abraham that one of his descendants would bless all nations on earth (Ge 12:2-3). Then God repeated that promise to the son of the promise, Isaac, and to his son, Jacob. Then God raised up a deliverer, Moses, who promised a prophet and deliverer like him. He instituted the meal you just celebrated, Passover, where you shed the blood of a perfect substitute, a lamb, so that death would pass over your door and not slay you. Then God sustained his people through the wilderness and brought water from a rock that pointed ahead to the one who would give the water of life (1 Cor 10:4). He rained down manna from heaven that pointed ahead to the one who would give the bread of life (Jn 6:58). Then God revealed his presence at the tabernacle until the day when he would reveal his presence right in the middle of his people in bodily form (Jn 1:14, 2:21). Every one of those animals the high priest Aaron sacrificed in the tabernacle was pointing ahead to the perfect high priest who sacrificed himself. Then God gave his wandering people rest in the Promised Land until the Messiah could give them true rest for their souls. Then God raised up a mighty king after his own heart, David, who pointed ahead to the Good Shepherd who would slay giant enemies for his people. He foresaw the day in Psalm 22 when a greater King would suffer in graphic detail. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 spoke of the great Servant of the Lord who had to first suffer and then be glorified. Finally, Micah chimed in by naming his birthplace. Don't you see how all that was slowly but surely revealing me?"

Have you felt like that recently? Have your false hopes made your understanding of Scripture far too shallow? When God promises to work out everything for my good, then good must be defined as a reopened economy and a reopened business, the freedom to travel again and the freedom to stand within six feet of people again. When God promises that he will bless my future, that future must include a job that won't get cut, an investment portfolio that won't tank, and plans that don't change by the day. But your understanding is far too shallow! What if God's commitment to you has been hiding in the pages of Scripture all along! God the Father looked at his Son and then thought of you, "Go, my Son. You must do this. You must suffer

rejection, scorn, beatings, and crucifixion, because I cannot bear to *not* see my people enter my glory.” Jesus looked at the pain of rejection, the pain of scorn, the pain of beatings, and the pain of crucifixion, and he swallowed the bitter pill, “I have to do it. I have to suffer for my people. I love them too much. There is no other way.” Jesus saw the resurrection, he saw his descent into hell where he proclaimed his victory to his fiercest opponents, he saw the glory at God’s right hand, all right ahead of him he could taste it, but he first tasted the cross before he gained the crown. Burn with a desire to open up more of Scripture and find Christ there. Don’t we need someone to revive our shallow understanding? Stay with me, Jesus!

To Revive My Grieving Heart

“Don’t you see, Mr. Stranger, it’s getting dark. I can’t get my mind off of all the interesting things you’ve said over the past few hours, but I still don’t quite know what to make of you. However, we’re home. Here’s the entrance to town. There’s no point for you to keep on going. There’s no hotels around. Just stay with us. We’ll set out an extra plate for dinner, and we’ll fix up the guest bed. Don’t give us any excuses. I’m glad you agree with us, and I’m glad we can spend some more time with you this evening. Take a seat. Have some bread. *Now* what are you doing? You’re taking the bread, you’re blessing the bread, you’re breaking the bread, you’re giving us the bread. I’m speechless! Mr. Stranger, who are you? You can’t be just any stranger! It’s been right in front of our eyes this whole time! How could we have missed it? You’re the Messiah! You were our Teacher, and you wanted to teach us more about yourself all along. Cleopas, *were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?* We got to go back to Jerusalem and share the good news! This day started with sadness and despair, but now it’s ended with joy and excitement!

Have you felt like that recently? There’s plenty of reasons to grieve. An extended stay-at-home order that has been extended again. Can’t get back to work. Still no vaccine. People sick and tired of dying and sick and tired of isolation. When you are growing lonely that you as a single person have no one to keep you company during these weeks of isolation, Jesus comes through the front door. When you sit down at the dinner table and realize that life will probably never be the same, Jesus comes through the front door. When the sun plunges down on the horizon and you think back to how the day was wasted with attempts to work from home, manage kids running around, and keep the house presentable, Jesus comes through the front door. Jesus turns lifeless faces into joyful faces and downtrodden people into excited people. Don’t we need someone to revive our grieving hearts today? Stay with me, Jesus!

Conclusion

For 32 days, Michael Goldsmith sat in a hospital. On a ventilator and in a coma for over two weeks, he depended on a new experimental drug and his family’s prayers. Michael came home recently to a hero’s welcome and that night his daughter fell asleep in his arms within minutes. His wife states, “I never allowed myself to believe he wouldn’t recover.”¹ Their hope, their understanding, their hearts all revived. Their dad can stay with them. No matter how bad it gets, never despair. Jesus is coming home to stay with you. He will revive your false hope, your shallow understanding, and your grieving hearts. Jesus lives! You will too! Amen.

¹ *NBC Nightly News*, “Search for Solutions: Experimental Coronavirus Drugs,” April 8, 2020; “New Jersey coronavirus patient receives joyous welcome home after experimental drug success,” April 20, 2020.