

## EASTER THURSDAY REFLECTION 2021

Luke 24:13-35

*When I am down, and oh, my soul so weary,  
when troubles come, and my heart burdened be.*

*Then I am still and wait here in the silence,  
until you come and sit awhile with me.*

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains.*

*You raise me up to walk on stormy seas.*

*I am strong when I am on your shoulders.*

*You raise me up to more than I can be.*

I first became aware of this song when Josh Groban included it on one of his albums. I love listening to it.

But I don't listen to it very often anymore. Why? Because several years ago, when one of our senior Spiritan Priests, who was like a mentor for me, was going through his cancer treatments, there were times when he would grow weary from the chemo and radiation. So he would go into his room... and play this song on his CD player. Sometimes, the volume was very loud. I think he turned up the volume so we could not hear him crying.

Sometimes, when I hear this song, I think about all the things this Spiritan priest did NOT get to do because he died at the age of 70. I think about his desire to get better because he had projects at church he wanted to complete; work he had begun, goals he had set. He wanted to bring them all to completion.

But he didn't get there. He didn't finish every task, or complete every project. He had hopes that were not going to see fulfilment here on earth.

I wonder... how many of our deceased loved ones, as they approached their last breath, were whispering to God: "I'm not ready yet. I still have things to do. I'm not finished."

True – some people can look back over their life, and they say with great gratitude and trust, "I am ready when the Lord calls me."

But what about people who die suddenly in a car crash or accident? What about perfectly healthy people who are at work one day, then die of a virus just days later?

They might say to God: "Not yet. I'm not done. I have more to do!"

And, for those who remain, isn't our grief made more acute because we were not ready to say goodbye? We started the journey together – but we didn't make it all the way.

This public health crisis makes us all aware of people who die too young, people who die unexpectedly. And the combination of daily headlines and social isolation makes many of us feel anxious. When will things get back to normal? Or, as one parishioner said to me the other day, "I know that Christians are supposed to have hope. But there are moments when I feel like I've lost my hope."

In Luke's Gospel, we hear about people's sadness and people's lost hopes. In this passage, there are THREE of the most heartbreaking words in the entire Bible. And those three words are: "we were hoping."

Two disciples of Jesus were walking away from Jerusalem, downcast because their master Jesus had been brutally crucified and buried in a tomb.

Jesus' words had made them dream. Jesus' miracles made them hope. Maybe, just maybe, God was finally going to fulfil his promises. Maybe the world was really going to change for the better.

Then it all fell apart. The crucifixion happened. And for some reason, these two disciples started walking away from the scene of the tragedy, toward a town called Emmaus. They were joined on that sad journey by someone they did not recognize. And as they tell this 'stranger' about their friend Jesus, they say those three sad words: "We had hoped... we were hoping..."

Notice the grammar - PAST tense. Their hope was in the past. Apparently, the work that Jesus started wasn't going to get done. The dreams he unleashed were not coming true. "We were hoping..."

Apparently, many people of faith confront the mystery of death not quite finished, not quite fulfilled, not quite having experienced what we'd hoped for.

Now, that can either lead us to despair, or it can lead us back to the Scriptures... to discover the good news.

Did you notice? The two disciples on the road to Emmaus had lost their hope. But, Hope found them! The two disciples saw Jesus die. But he found them. He was risen and walking the journey with them. They felt lost. He came and found them. They felt unfulfilled. He filled them with new life.

Maybe we human beings don't get to finish all our work, because the Lord is the one who completes that work within us. Maybe we don't have to exhaust ourselves, completing every task, finishing every project, getting ourselves ready. Maybe the Lord is saying to us,

“you will only be complete when you let me complete you. You will only be finished when you let me finish in you. You will only be ready if you let me embrace you in my love.”

We are never quite ready. But if we confess that, we can experience the peace and freedom which happens when God calls us by name and makes us whole.

We don't have to go find God. God finds us.

The sad disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't have to go find Jesus. The risen Jesus found them.

Which brings me back to that song. The refrain says: “You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains, you raise me up, to walk on stormy seas.”

And how do we find that person who raises us up and give us hope?

We don't find him. The Raiser-Upper finds us. As the song says:

When I am down and oh my soul so weary,

when troubles come and my heart burdened be

Then I am still and wait here in the silence,

until you come and sit awhile with me.

Until you come and sit awhile with me.

In this Easter week during our quarantine, the One who raises us up comes and sits with us. In the silence. In the music. In our family and friends. In the beauty of creation. In the Scriptures. In our prayer.

He comes and sits awhile with us, and gives us hope, and raises us up.

Fr Patrick