

“Our Double Dose of Hope”  
Philippians 3:7-14; John 11:21-27;  
Luke 24:44-53; John 14:1-4

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The young man had come to Jesus for a confirmation that he was on the right path. Jesus had noticed the man had done a lot of good things in his life; he had followed the law. But then Jesus had asked him to let go of his wealth. He couldn't do it.

As he walked away, perhaps he heard them say, “Jesus, how can anybody, then, get into the kingdom of heaven?” and Jesus said, “What is impossible for humans is possible for God.” Perhaps he went away with that ringing in his ears as he wondered what his next step was. Perhaps he had come earnestly wanting to know if he was on the right path. He was pretty sure he was there, and then Jesus asked him to do something he just couldn't see how he could do. He was wealthy, people depended on him, he was a responsible person. He couldn't let go of all that.

Perhaps he felt like now he was a little bit at the end of his rope—not sure what to do next, not wanting to let go of where he's been. Or perhaps he felt like he was at the end of a chapter at the end of a book and he didn't want to finish it, because what came next? It wasn't just another chapter. It wasn't just the same story. He had to close the book.

Perhaps it's not just an ending that he deals with, or that we deal with. Sometimes that ending feels just like something good is on the other end. Sometimes it feels like we run into a brick wall and you don't know how to go from there. The world we encounter sometimes brings us to the end of our rope, shuts the book for us.

Martha felt that way. She felt at the end of a rope, a loss of a life. Her brother, Lazarus, had died. She was sure that if Jesus had been there, he would not have died. Jesus suggested there is the resurrection. She said, “Yes, I believe that.” If we read on, Jesus would actually enact that reality, bringing Lazarus back and showing the power of God at work.

It's that way with his own life, as well, isn't it? Jesus comes to the end of a rope—in some ways literally, with the lashes he took. It feels like the end as we read through that passion story. He encounters not only the ending of a chapter, but the evil in the world—an evil that often makes it feel like we're at the end of our rope or the end of a book or confronting a brick wall. It feels like for a moment that it's over. I would guess that most of us have had that experience somewhere in our lives – it's over – and wondered if there was anything next.

With God there is a next. That's what the resurrection is all about. It's not over. The good may look like it's been overpowered, but it's not. God doesn't work by overpowering with violence, but God comes back up. It always makes me think of a bubbling spring. You try to stop it in one place and it comes bubbling up in another place. The best the world could throw at God felt for a moment like it was victorious, but the resurrection is God's power at work saying no to the victory of evil and saying yes to the power of love, yes to the wonder of life.

The resurrection is an amazing thing and it's interesting to talk about it in relationship to the ascension. As Jesus arises, he shows again the wonder of God bringing goodness to life. Goodness will never be overcome; God will always enter in. The amazing thing is about how God enters in. We think about Jesus being resurrected and the wonder of him being present to his disciples, but then he goes away. It's not only Jesus that's resurrected; it's what he's doing. He's bringing God's way to life and he does that again in his resurrection. He brings God's way to life and what happens? A whole movement is formed. Christianity begins. Jesus doesn't stay there and say, "Now I need to tell you exactly how to do these things as we go along" in that human way we think about a person being next to us. In that reading about his ascension, he says, "I went through all this and now God's power is going to be with *you*." He blesses them and ascends. God's power is with *you*.

So as we live into those end-of-our rope moments, we can remember that God's power is not gone, that it will show itself again in the midst of our lives, in the midst of this world. The good will never be overcome. It's a good that *we* get empowered to do. The resurrection is that hope, that wonder. It's a recognition that whenever we feel captivated, there is still one that is Captain over it all. No matter how it seems that death is winning, God can bring life. No matter how much it feels like it's depressing, there's always the wonder of what God will do. No matter how often it feels impossible, with God it *is* possible, and there is hope.

Really, the ascension is not only giving us the opportunity to live our lives and work out God's power among us, the ascension goes beyond that. As we confront our own mortality and recognize that our lives are like a book and some day we will close this chapter, the ascension is also a recognition that there is the next step, a new book. He does go on to prepare a place for us and there will be a homecoming. It is wonder beyond wonders. We have a double dose of hope—the resurrection and the ascension.

It is this double dose of hope that gives us something that we heard in Kathleen Warnick's memorial service yesterday. She would tell her children sometimes, when they had to do something they didn't want to do, "You don't *have* to, you *get* to!" God doesn't just come and say "You don't have to, you get to." He gives us the hope to show us that. It turns life from a "have to" into a "get to." It's the wonder of faith. It's our double dose of hope. We don't *have* to, we *get* to. We *get* to live this life, to share it, to love one another, to do good, and to be God's children. We don't have to, but we get to.

Lord, there are times we feel at the end of our rope, at the last chapter, up against a brick wall. Remind us of your resurrection, of your presence with us and the power of goodness that will bubble up. Remind us that you go before us and prepare a place, and we do have a home to come to. Remind us of your love for us and help us to see where it is that we have a "get to" to do—where we get to be yours, we get to do the good, share the love, show your grace, be your people. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.