

But We Had Hoped...
Luke 24:1 – 12; Luke 24:13 – 35; Romans 8:18 – 28
Sunday, April 21, 2019 (Easter Sunday)

Things don't always go according to plans. A couple of weeks ago, just before we moved into our new house, I had to go over to the house one night to put together a nightstand for one of the kid's rooms that we had bought from Ikea. I told Jen, "I won't be very long, maybe an hour or so." But if you've ever put together furniture from Ikea, you know that's where the problems *started*. Ikea is a Swedish company, and their instructions aren't always the clearest or the easiest to follow. But it was only a small nightstand; *how hard could it be?*

So I opened up the box and spread all the parts and pieces around the bedroom floor, and I found the instruction book. I opened the book and right there on the first page is a little picture of an allen wrench, to show you that all you need to assemble this nightstand is the allen wrench that comes with it. Which was *great* because I had left my *tools* at the other house, and I really didn't feel like stopping everything to run back over and get them. I just wanted to get this done and get to bed.

Well, imagine my surprise when the first thing it tells me to do is attach the drawer rails to the side panels with screws. Screws, by their very definition, require a *screwdriver*. Which I did not have. But I remembered that the man we bought the house from had left me a box of screwdrivers in the basement. Thank you, Bert. So I went downstairs, got a screwdriver, and got started screwing the drawer rails on.

Now, the *problem* with Ikea instructions is that they don't have any *words* on them. Just *pictures*. And the pictures are sometimes a little hard to make out. Take the drawer rails, for instance. There were eight rails – four of them went on the two drawers, and four of them went

on the inside of the nightstand. And while they might all *look* identical, they are *not*. And the instructions do not differentiate between them. They don't tell you, "Use piece *A*, not piece *B*, because piece *B* goes on the drawer, and you need the one that goes on the inside of the nightstand." You don't find *that* out until the end, when you go to put the drawers in, and *they don't work*.

So I'm just going along, putting this thing together, squinting at the directions to try to figure out, "Is that *this* piece with the hole at the top, or is it this *other* piece with the hole at the *bottom*? Which one do they want me to use?" Then I turn the page and see a picture where they want me to take these plastic pegs that came with it (they look like big plastic screws, except they're flat on the top; they don't have a place to use a screwdriver). In the instructions is a picture of this plastic peg with *lightning bolts* around it. What does *that* mean? Is there an electrical component to this nightstand that I don't know about? Am I going to get *hurt* doing this? I realize that they want me to *hammer* the pegs into the panels of the nightstand to help hold it all together. Great! Only problem is, I don't have a hammer, *because you told me that all I needed was the allen wrench that came with it!* I run back down to the basement, but Bert didn't leave me a box of hammers. So I figure, just use the *screwdriver* to pound them in. And it worked...eventually. It takes a lot longer to hammer something with the end of a screwdriver than it does with a hammer. And there were *eight* of them. It turns out you *also* need a hammer to hammer in the tiny nails that hold on the back panel. A screwdriver absolutely will *not* work for that. But I hadn't gotten that far yet.

We are already a couple of hours in at this point, but the end is in sight, so I'm plugging along. Until I turn to the next page. Again, Ikea instructions do not have *words*, they use *pictures*, and occasionally they will use a picture of a person to show you what you're supposed to do; how

you're supposed to hold it or move it. And the people don't have faces. They are just these cartoonish outlines of people. So I turn the page, and there is the outline of a person going like *this* (holding up his empty hands like he's saying, "Beats me."). *What does this mean?* Has the man in the instructions just given up? Is he telling *me* to give up? Has he just realized that he doesn't have a hammer for all of these tiny nails that he's supposed to drive in? At that point I decide that I don't *need* the instructions anymore. I can just look at the pieces that are left and figure it out. And eventually I did. Maybe not the way they *intended* me to, but I got it all together, and it is *still* together, so I think I'm okay.

I had the instructions, the plans for how this was all supposed to go. But things don't always go according to plans. Sometimes it's something as insignificant as a nightstand. And sometimes it's something much bigger. A diagnosis. The loss of a job. The loss of someone you love. The end of a relationship. Addiction. Depression. Any number of other things that we just don't see coming. It's like we've got this plan for how our lives are supposed to go, how we *want* them to go. But things don't always go according to plans.

Saviors are not *supposed* to die. Messiahs are not *supposed* to be crucified. That was not in *anyone's* plans. For the *centuries* that the people of Israel talked about their Messiah, they said, "He will come and be our king! He will sit on the throne of David! He will lead our army and save us from our enemies! He will bring us peace and economic prosperity! He will be great, and he will lead our nation to greatness!" They most certainly did not say, "He will come among the poor and the outcast. He will be a friend to sinners, lepers, drunkards, and prostitutes. He will stand opposed to the political and religious order of the day. He will be convicted as a criminal and sentenced to death. His friends will abandon him. He will be crucified and die a

bloody, painful death.” When you think of a Messiah, that is *not* what you think of. But then again, things don’t always go according to plans.

We see it in the story of these two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus. They’re leaving Jerusalem, going back home, back to their lives. Their savior is dead. Everything is over. When this stranger comes up and they start telling him about the things that have happened, they say, “Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. Our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” *But we had hoped....* How many times have we expressed that exact same sentiment?

“The doctor said it’s this, but we had hoped...”

“I don’t think it’s going to work out, but we had hoped...”

“There’s nothing else we can do, but we had hoped...”

And in those moments when our plans fall apart and our hopes are dashed, it can be very hard to see the presence of God.

There’s a song by Andy Gullahorn called *Grand Canyon*:

*There are endless tears
And suffering we can’t explain
There are dark grey clouds
That never seem to drift away
There’s despair in the morning
That will tie us to the bed
But the story isn’t over yet*

*There's a white flag raised
Saying we can't bear anymore
There are silent nights
Because nothing's like it was...
And our dreams retell the sadness
So we cannot forget
But the story isn't over yet*

*I took a picture of the Grand Canyon
So I could remember that day*

*There are cards and letters
All letting their love be heard
Sympathetic smiles
From those at a loss for words
In our wake there are whispers
That tell of where we've been
But the story isn't over yet*

*I took a picture of the Grand Canyon
So I could remember that day
Oh but the beauty of the Grand Canyon
Stretches way beyond the frame*

*I can't sleep
There's too much weighing on my mind
But there's a bird out there
Still singing in the dead of night
Like it knows there's a season
When the sun's gonna set
But the story isn't over yet
The story isn't over*

He talks about suffering, pain, sadness like the Grand Canyon – this giant *hole*. And when you try to take a *picture* of the Grand Canyon, there's no way you can get the whole thing in one shot. He says the beauty of the Grand Canyon stretches way beyond the frame. There are so many times in life when all we can see is the *hole*. “The sufferings of this present time,” as Paul calls them. We can't always see this bigger picture that stretches out beyond our limited sight. We can't always see God's presence in this situation.

When the women came back from the tomb and told the disciples what had happened, the disciples couldn't see beyond the sufferings of this present time to notice God's presence among them. It says they thought it was an idle tale, and they didn't believe them. But the story wasn't over yet. The disciples on the road to Emmaus couldn't see beyond the sufferings of this present time to notice God's presence among them. But the story wasn't over yet.

Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." He's saying, "The story isn't over yet. There is something *so much more* beyond the frame of what we can see." And that's what hope *is*. He says, "Hope that is *seen* is not hope. For who hopes for what is *seen*? (If you can *see* it, you don't need to *hope* for it, because it's *there*. You *have* it.)" Paul says that we *hope* for what we do *not* see. For what we have no proof of; no evidence that any of this is going to work out. We might only be able to *see* the gaping hole, the sufferings of this present time, but we *hope* for something more. For the possibility that the story isn't over yet. That God is somehow present among us, working all things together for good.

That doesn't mean that God *makes* the bad things happen, but that when things fall apart, God can pick up the pieces of our broken lives and make something *new*. That God can take our broken plans and *use* them to get us where God is calling us to be. What Easter shows us is that while things don't always go according to plans, God can take the things that "aren't supposed to happen that way" and make great, life-changing things come out of them. God takes crucifixion and turns it into resurrection. God takes death and turns it into new life. God can turn our mourning into dancing, our tears into laughter, and our despair into joy. Easter reminds us that even when it seems like things have come to an end, the story isn't over yet. Because Christ is

alive and at work among us, even today, even in *this*, taking all our failed plans and reworking them into the glory of his kingdom.

We are called to be people of resurrection. People who live our lives trusting that God can bring new life and new possibilities out of our shattered hopes. People whose eyes are open to God's presence, even in the midst of disappointment and suffering and sadness. People who can say, "The doctor said it was this, *but we had hoped!*" "It didn't look like it was going to work out, *but we had hoped!*" "There was nothing else we could do, *but we had hoped!*"

When our plans break down and life doesn't go the way we expected, it is *then* that God is at work, transforming our lives according to *God's* plan. Easter is our promise of that. It is our promise that, even when things don't go according to plans, God is *with* us and God *loves* us, and the story isn't over yet.