

April 21-25, 2025 Edition

Following

The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 172

The Road To Emmaus: Surprised By Hope

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;O) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: One of the main benefits of the Great Rescue is Hope. Hope is one of the things a human just cannot live without. There was a story about a prisoner of war who was convinced to work for the enemy as an informant in exchange for being released. When after a time he asked his captor when he might be released he was told it would never happen. That he had been tricked. As the story goes the prisoner went back to his barracks, laid down on his cot and promptly died. Is it true? It must be... I read it on the internet! But even if it isn't true it illustrates a very important point- hope is vitally important to human beings. And the Bible has A LOT to say about hope including this little nugget:

Hope will never disappoint us. Romans 5:5 (NCV)

But is it true? I mean, it's in the Bible so it must be true, right? Before we go any further I will say emphatically that I believe it is true what but maybe not in the way we in 21st century Christianity have been led to believe it's true (especially if you watch much religious television). If you tune into many of the religious TV stations on cable or satellite these days you'll eventually find someone telling you that God will be your cosmic Santa Claus if you just believe enough (and sometimes they add "if you just give enough... to me"). And religious TV isn't alone. Sometimes I think local churches inadvertently give this impression with the stories we tell about answered prayer in our weekend worship services. I don't know about you but the only stories I can think of that I've heard told in church services about the power of prayer and the power of God to save His people all result in an outcome that makes sense to us and has led to a break through or victory.

But not in the Bible.

One of the first lessons the early Christians were taught about the power of God to save His people and to answer prayer is found in Acts chapter 12 when king Herod arrested Peter & James. He immediately kills James (beheaded) and when he sees how much of a crowd pleaser this is for the Jews he decides to stretch it out a bit and puts Peter in jail for the night with the intention of killing him the next day. That night an angel comes to the jail and unlocks Peter's chains and walks him into freedom. Every time I've heard a sermon preached about that story I hear preachers telling of how God answers prayers and how He has the power to save His people (all of which is true).

But how often have you heard a sermon about God's power to save James? I don't know about you but I've never heard one. So what do we say to James' brother? Or his mom? Or his friends? Where was God when James needed Him? I believe God was right there when James needed him. I believe God never left James' side. And I believe that James immediately understood the verse we read at the start of this devotional thought better than any of us on this side of eternity will ever be able to understand it. In fact, I imagine if we were to track down Peter & James as soon as we get to heaven and ask them both who got the better deal on that day when Herod arrested them they would both agree- James got the best of that deal.

So how then should I live and how then should I see Hope? Great questions. Maybe something to think about today and over the coming days as we deal with this sticky

concept and try to figure out how to live a life of hope in a world that sometimes gives us the opposite.

Tuesday Reflection: So what does the Hope of Jesus look like in our lives? Well, it's got lots of different facets- sort of like a diamond I would suppose. Think about the day when Jesus was resurrected from the grave. Early on that Sunday morning three women went to the tomb to finish preparing the body for burial. When they arrived an angel was there and told them that Jesus was risen and they should go tell the rest of the disciples. The Bible tells us the women then remembered that's exactly what Jesus said would happen and they ran back to tell the rest of the disciples.

For the women who saw the angel hope came early that day. But sometimes hope comes late, doesn't it?

Let's fast forward a little bit and we find two of Jesus' disciples are going home. The women have told them what the angel said. Peter and John have been to the tomb and testified that it was indeed empty. So why are they going home? Because sometimes hope comes late, doesn't it? Cleopas (one of the people heading home because he didn't really believe what everyone was asking him to believe) is struggling. His doubts have overcome his faith and he doesn't know what else to do. Here's how Luke sets the stage:

That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. Luke 24:13-16 (NLT)

In other words, Jesus was disguised. If you were with us on Easter weekend you know that Jesus did this to Mary Magdalene in the graveyard too. He's doing it again- He's kind of pranking His disciples. Now before we get to what Jesus does and says let's talk about these two disciples. We know that one of them is named, Cleopas (we'll find that out a little bit later in the text) while the other disciple remains unnamed. So who is this other mysterious disciple? Well, we don't know for sure but I think we can make a pretty safe educated guess. John tells us that one of the women at the foot of the cross during Jesus' crucifixion was Mary, the wife of Cleopas. Most scholars believe she was one of the "Marys" who the gospel writers identify as being key players at the crucifixion and the resurrection. I don't think it's a big stretch to say that Cleopas' wife, Mary, was one of the ladies who just that morning went to the tomb and were met by an angel and an empty tomb. One of the ladies who rushed home to tell the disciples what they had seen and who had remembered that Jesus told them He would rise.

So who is this other unnamed disciple walking with Cleopas? Like I said, we don't know for certain but doesn't it make sense that it's Mary? Cleopas and his wife are walking home from Jerusalem to Emmaus. And when Luke tells us that as they walked they were talking and "discussing" what had happened the English translators aren't really giving us a clear picture of what's happening. The Greek word Luke uses that here is translated as "discussing" is the word used most often for a spirited debate. Do you see what's going

on? They're arguing. Why? Because Mary saw the angel. I'm guessing she doesn't want to go home. She wants to stick around in Jerusalem and see what happens. But Cleopas must have "put his foot down" and now she's going but she's not happy about it.

Enter Jesus. Are you getting the picture. They don't know it's Jesus- yet. He starts walking with them but they don't know it's Him- yet. So Jesus asks them... what are you talking about? And they say... now I'm paraphrasing this a little bit... what kind of idiot are you? I get this question a lot. Usually I say, just a regular one I guess. An ordinary idiot. Nothing special here. But Jesus doesn't reply sarcastically- He just says, tell me about it. And they begin to describe how the story they thought they were living took an unexpected turn and they were shocked at how the story they thought they were living out turned out not be the story they were living out at all. There was this man named Jesus- He said things people never said before- He did things people never did- and then these words that all of us can relate to-

But we were hoping that he was the one who would redeem Israel. Luke 24:21 (NCV)

To redeem meant to validate. Israel was a slave but when the messiah came they thought that would mean Israel would be the most powerful nation on earth. Militarily, politically, economically... and that would validate Israel's claim to be the people of God. And on top of that these particular Jews would have been hoping that Jesus would vindicate their belief that He was the messiah. They took a lot of grief for that belief too. And I don't know where you are at this point in your life but one thing I know- if you live long enough you're going to be disappointed. And for followers of Jesus it's tough when we're disappointed. Because religious tv will tell you if you do what God wants then He will vindicate and validate your life with success. With a lack of pain and trouble. But that's not the way life works, is it?

You can probably identify with those words, "we were hoping."

But their hope disappointed them... at least they thought it had. And that's why they're going home. You and I would tell them- don't worry- it's ok. He's back. But they weren't looking for that story line. Nobody expected Him to be resurrected. Nobody. That's why they were scattering. Even after these strange reports started coming in from the women who saw Him alive. See, they could believe He did things nobody else ever did because they saw Him do them. They could believe He said things nobody ever said because they heard Him say them. But as soon as somebody said, "He's alive", at that point you lost everyone- even the husband of a woman who saw an angel. But something stopped them. Something caused them to come back together and reunite. And dedicate the rest of their lives to one message- He's alive! And that understanding brought them this hope that never disappoints. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Cleopas doesn't believe- yet.

I guess that's the first lesson in this story about hope- sometimes it comes early like it did for Mrs. Cleopas but sometimes it comes late like it did for Cleopas.

But it's coming. Hope is on the way for Cleopas and Mary. How about for you? I know speaking for myself I've seen hope come early in my life and I've also experienced when

hope comes late. How do you handle the times when your hope seems to be disappointing you?

Wednesday Reflection: Do you remember yesterday when I said that Cleopas and Mary were disappointed because when Jesus died it appeared to them that they weren't in fact living out the story they thought they were living out (if not you remember now, don't you?)? Well, it turns out the story they thought they were living out was really the story they thought they were living out before Jesus died. The real illusion that Cleopas suffered from was that he thought that story could be derailed by something as illusory as death. Now to be fair, who can blame him. Can you? I know I can't. How many people weren't fooled by that illusion. Very quickly it would seem absurd to the disciples that they had once thought death could hold Jesus down for any real length of time but on Sunday it was a commonly held illusion. And that illusion made Cleopas miss the point of his entire life. When Cleopas voices his disappointment that the hope they thought they had found in Jesus turned out to be misguided this was Jesus' reply:

So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory? Luke 24:25-26 (MES)

HAHAHAHAHA! Remember, they don't know this is Jesus yet. And this stranger looks at them and calls them block-heads (I know I'm paraphrasing a little bit but that's what I hear when I read that). I wonder what ran through Cleopas' mind when the stranger said that to him? But every one of us can identify with these people walking to Emmaus. We think we know what our story is. We think we know where we're going, what's going to happen. And then in a moment of blinding clarity we realize- we didn't understand at all. Maybe you realize that if Jesus was here walking with you he'd call you a block-head? Ok... maybe not. But that's the human condition. You think you know what's going on but you don't. None of us really do. You won't really know what your story is until you recognize and start walking with Jesus. Until then you'll be continually shocked when your story takes a turn that you didn't see coming.

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for... part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. Ephesians 1:11-12 (MES)

Have you ever thought about what it is that blinds us to Jesus' presence in our lives. That keeps us from seeing Him. That keeps us from realizing that we are lost without Him? The Bible calls it, "idolatry." Now I know we believe that we are far too sophisticated to fall for that sort of foolishness. When we hear the word idolatry we conjure up images of savages bowing down before carved heads and dancing around a fire. We would never fall for that. We're too modern.

But the gods haven't gone away- they've just gotten sneaky. They will get us to sacrifice the best of our time, energy, resources and even relationships to them without even knowing we're doing it. And they'll distract us from recognizing that the emptiness we are experiencing can only be filled by Jesus.

Yes, we no longer fall for worshipping a statue. So what are the new “American idols”? The gods that ensnare Americans are things like wealth, success, power and pleasure. We believe that if we get enough money, success, power or pleasure then we’ll be fulfilled. And while there’s nothing wrong with wealth, success, power or pleasure (in fact they are all part of what God put us on this earth to enjoy and in their proper place and proportion they are a big part of what can make this life sweet) they make a lousy foundation for your life. So what keeps so many of us from recognizing that sooner and turning to Jesus for our ultimate fulfillment? The lie that if we had just a little bit more we would finally be happy. It’s pretty much the reason celebrities who have reached the pinnacle of their profession do so much relationship hopping and get themselves into trouble with substance abuse. They’ve spent their lives believing the lie that if they just reached the top of their profession (acting, politics, building wealth, etc.) but when they got to the top they found it empty. So then they look around trying to understand what’s wrong and decide it must be whatever relationship they’re currently in and so they cheat and lie and jump from one relationship to the next looking for that thing that will ultimately fulfill them. And they never find it apart from Jesus. The Bible tells us they will never truly understand their story apart from Jesus’ story.

The same thing is true for Cleopas and Mary. These people had a story- it just wasn’t the story they expected. Then this stranger comes along and walks with them and tells them, you will only understand your story when you understand your life within the bigger context of the story of God. And then Luke writes this:

Then starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. Luke 24:27 (NCV)

Jesus explains the entire Great Rescue! OH MAN, I WISH I COULD HAVE BEEN THERE! Or at least I wish Luke had recorded that entire sermon the way Matthew recorded the Sermon On The Mount. But he didn’t. What Luke did do is make sure that we understood a very important truth- that our stories will never make sense to us until we start to understand them within the context of Jesus’ story. The whole time Jesus is telling them His story... the story of God... they as they listen to Him (still disguised to them) they are starting to understand their story. And that will lead us to the next observation on faith which we’ll look at tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time thinking about the things that threaten to distract you from the story you were created to live and how rejecting those distractions in favor of Jesus’ story helps you to see your own story more clearly.

Thursday Reflection: One thing about the Hope of Easter is that as you start to see how His story (have you ever stopped and thought about how the word “history” breaks down into His-story before? Coincidence? I think not...) intersects with your story suddenly your story will start to make a whole lot more sense. His story brings blinding clarity to my story as it turns out.

Think about what happens with Cleopas and Mary. They’re walking and talking with Jesus even though they don’t realize it yet. He has sort of scolded Cleopas for being bone

headed about the Rescuer and then preached him a sermon illustrating how the entire Old Testament was about the Rescuer and how the things that happened to Jesus lined up perfectly with what the Bible said would happen to the Rescuer. When they finally reach Emmaus, Cleopas invites Jesus into his home to have dinner. The stranger accepts Cleopas' kind offer. Jesus sits down and just takes over the position of host (which would have been a very rude thing to do for anyone else but if Cleopas was offended I'm betting his offense didn't last long) and breaks the bread and as soon as He does this happens:

As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! Luke 24:30-31 (NLT)

"Suddenly their eyes were opened." Does that ring any bells? If you've been with us since the beginning of this series then you might remember the second lesson of Adam & Eve in Eden. God tells them not to eat the fruit from the Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good And Evil. He tells them that if they eat that fruit they will die. The serpent comes and tells them God is lying. God doesn't want them to eat the fruit because if they do they'll become "like God" and their eyes would be opened. And when they fall for that lie we read:

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame. Genesis 3:7 (NLT)

Satan's temptation wasn't a complete lie. When they ate the fruit their eyes were opened- they just didn't like what they saw. In fact, they were horrified by what they saw. God comes to discuss what's happened and tells Adam & Eve that He will send a Rescuer. Why? For what? Well, as it turns out it wasn't to close their eyes- it was to open their eyes to another reality. One that wouldn't bring shame and guilt and regret but a reality that would bring joy and mercy and grace and forgiveness.

And hope.

A reality that brought clarity once again to each human life. And in this story of Cleopas, Mary and the stranger who walked with them even in the midst of their doubt and regret and confusion we see the way in which Jesus opens our eyes.

And we see the truest and most complete view of God. Who He Is. What the Great Rescue would be all about. When He told Adam & Eve that He would send a Descendant to crush the head of the serpent- the one that had lied to them about Who God Is and who they would become. The Serpent convinced them that they could be "like God" (idolatry in its truest form) and they had fallen for that lie. That lie had opened their eyes in ways they never wanted. Now because of the Great Rescue God is able to open our eyes in a completely different way and make us not "like God" but "like human". Human in the form it was designed to be. A life lived walking with Jesus, understanding our stories from within the context of His story and the longer we walk with Him and become like Him the more clarity it brings to our own stories. The Great Rescue is proof of something that the apostle Paul wrote:

if we give up on him, he does not give up- for there's no way he can be false to himself. 2 Timothy 2:13 (MES)

I love that- "there's no way he can be false to himself." Thank God for that! Think about it for a minute- Cleopas' (try to say Cleopas' name in the possessive without it sounding wrong. Go ahead- try it. I couldn't do it. If you were at church this last weekend you may have noticed I didn't try it. Instead I'd find a creative way around using the possessive form of his name ;o) wife tells him that an angel told her that Jesus was ALIVE and what does he do. Filled with doubt and confusion and fear he leaves Jerusalem and does Jesus give up on him? No. Why not? Was it because Cleopas deserved to not be given up on? Nope. Jesus didn't give up on Cleopas because Jesus can't be false to Himself. Let's go WAY back to the second story in the story of the Bible- Adam & Eve. When they decided they knew better than God and believed the lie that He didn't really care about them did God give up on them? No. Why not? Because He cannot be false to Himself. The story of the Old Testament is all about how God refused to give up on Israel even when we look at it and think He should have. Even when He allowed trouble and pain to come into their lives God never gave up on them. Why? Because He cannot be false to Himself.

How about you and me? Once upon a time there was this guy named Ed who failed miserably over and over again and believed the lie that he knew better than God what would make him happy and satisfied. Did God give up on Ed? Nope. Why? Well, I can GUARANTEE you it wasn't because Ed deserved not to be given up on. So why didn't He give up on Ed? Because He cannot be false to Himself. And once upon a time there was a you (I know that sentence structure is strange but you know what I mean). I may not even know your name but I know this- you have at times believed the lie that you know better than God what will make you happy and you've gone your own way too. And did God give up on you? Nope. Even if it felt like it, He didn't/hasn't/won't. Why? Because there's something special about you? Well, kind of. You are loved by the King. And the King cannot be false to Himself.

It's the story of the entire Bible. Once upon a time there was a King who created everything and decided He would focus all His love on human beings. He made them in His image. He made plans for how they would partner with Him to change the world. He made every single one of them unique (some of us with a capital "U"!) with their own fingerprints, DNA, personalities, likes, dislikes and appearance. All of us like sheep have gone astray and yet, HE NEVER GAVE UP ON US.

And thank God. Otherwise we would all be in a world of trouble. But thank God, He is always true to Himself which means He is always true to us because that's Who He Is at His core. Tomorrow we will talk more about what living this story out in our lives can look like but for today maybe spend some time thinking about how understanding His-Story has brought clarity to your story over the course of your life.

Friday Reflection: WARNING- THIS ONE IS LONG! So what does this story have to do with my life other than realizing that Jesus walks with me often even when I'm not aware it's Him? Well, how does He do that? How does Jesus walk with us when we don't recognize it's Him walking with us? Through other people. As I look back

on my life I now realize how often Jesus' presence in my life was actually brought to me courtesy of others who already understood that they were walking with Him. They helped make Jesus real to me in ways I never could comprehend without them.

That's evangelism. Have you ever given much thought to the concept of evangelism? If you grew up in the kind of church I did then that word might strike fear in your heart and bring a cold sweat to your brow. The word literally means to "share the good news" but it never felt good to me. And yet I was convinced that if I didn't share Jesus with friends, family and strangers (basically everyone I ever came in contact with EVER) then it was my fault if they never established a relationship with Jesus. The biggest problem with that was I wasn't very effective at "sharing the gospel" with people. I never saved one person (in the way the people who came to talk about evangelism at my church presented it anyways). So I stopped "evangelizing" people. But then I felt guilty. So I started evangelizing again. But then I was miserable (and so were the people who were lucky enough to have me sharing the "good news" with them ;o)

As I aged (I don't use the phrase "grew up" because that would invite all manner of snarky comments from the peanut gallery so I'll just stick with aged...) I started to hear rumors that perhaps evangelism wasn't what I had been told it was. As I studied the concept I started to realize that was right and wrong. I started to realize there are lots of ways to share the good news. The way it had been presented to me as a young man wasn't wrong- it just wasn't the only way to do it. God uses different people in different ways and I started to ask myself if maybe God would have another way of evangelizing through me that was more successful and didn't leave me (and my lucky evangelizees) feeling like a miserable failure.

I didn't really have a name for it until many years later but the style of evangelism I felt God pulling me towards I now would call, "Emmaus Road evangelism". A form of evangelism where I walk with people no matter where they are and try my best to be Jesus to them until they get to a point where they can see Jesus for themselves as He opens their eyes not just to Who He Is but also to who they are- a winning combination when it comes to living the human life. When I took over as the pastor at Riverside Community Church we had to decide how the church would go about evangelism. Like I said, we didn't really have a name for it but a small group of life long churchy Christians decided that we felt like God was leading in this direction of walking with "sinners" wherever they happened to be for as long as it took for them to see Jesus for themselves. We would stand in for Jesus until such time as they would realize Jesus had never really left their side. We all wondered what that would mean. What it would look like. Turns out it wasn't going to take long for us to find out.

The very first visitors that walked through the doors of our church were a family with three little girls. Their entire exposure to spirituality had been through Alcoholics Anonymous up until that point but they realized as their girls were growing up that maybe an AA meeting was not the best place for the girls to learn about spirituality. So they hatched a plan to visit one church a month for a year and at the end of that year to decide which church to join. When he told me about their plan I was bummed. We were only the second church on their list and that meant they weren't sticking around. After

the second week he approached me and told me that their search was over. I thought he meant that it had only taken them two weeks to figure out that Riverside wasn't the place for them and they were moving on. I was blown away when he told me that they loved it here and had decided this is where they're staying. I so badly wanted to ask him, "why?"

So we started walking with them. They did pretty much everything we did. The couple sat down and shared their spiritual journey with Judy and me one day. They were both recovering alcoholics and the husband had no problem with step number 2- the "Higher Power" step. He had always believed in Jesus (even if that belief had no impact on his day to day life) and so had chosen Jesus as his Higher Power. She had a tougher time. She had been raised as an atheist and she didn't like church people at all. So when she was told that she had to choose a Higher Power she resisted. She told her brand new sponsor that she didn't believe in any Higher Power but her sponsor told her the program wouldn't work unless she chose one so just pick a Higher Power, any Higher Power would do.

She walked out of that meeting and the first thing she saw was a humongous tree. She stopped and thought, "that tree is bigger than I am. It's been here longer than I have. I will make that tree my Higher Power." And she did. She started praying to the tree. And over time as the program worked and saved her life she said she started to realize that there was a personal force behind the tree. At first she labelled that force Nature. Then she said she started to realize it was much bigger than even Nature and she labeled it Universe. and eventually she came to the conclusion that the force behind the Universe was God (whoever she is was how she finished that sentence). She finished telling us her story by saying, "God saved my life and we figured that if the God thing worked out so well we might as well give the Jesus thing a try next." I. Was. Shocked. Can you say that out loud I wondered? Is she about to be struck by lightning? Should I scoot away so I'm not hit by friendly fire from the sky? I don't think my face betrayed my inner turmoil (I don't think it did anyways) and in the end I just nodded my head and said, "awesome". And we continued walking with them.

She was a clown at our very first Harvest Festival. She was the Easter Bunny for the first few years that we had an Easter Egg Hunt. One day she came to me and asked if she could organize a blood drive at church. She said, "I don't truly understand it all yet but I can tell that blood has a lot to do with what Jesus was doing so I thought it would make perfect sense to have a blood drive- wouldn't that make Jesus proud?" I was equal parts super proud and super horrified because I HATE having my blood drawn. But I did it. She organized the blood drive and I gave blood.

And we kept walking with them. They really seemed to be getting it. But were they where they needed to be? I was impatient. I wanted to interrogate them and make sure they were "ok" (and by ok I meant do they yet think exactly the way I think because anything else is not "ok"). Judy was so patient with me. She kept encouraging me to give God the time to work His miracle in their hearts in His timing. She got me a little plaque that had a watering can painted on it watering some seeds and showed that while there was growth taking place beneath the surface you couldn't tell from looking at the ground where the seeds had been planted. The words, "to plant a seed and wait is to believe" were painted on that plaque. I still have that plaque where I can see it on a regular basis. Until then my

method of checking to see if any growth was taking place was to dig up the seed and look for roots.

And so we kept walking with them and left the growth up to God. One day we had a guest speaker. A preacher from Tulsa, Oklahoma named Marvin Philips (my hero and a preacher that made me think maybe I could be a preacher if I could be like him). Marvin preached about the simplicity of conversion. He told the story of the Ethiopian treasurer from Acts chapter 8 and how after Philip had "preached Jesus to him" the next words out of the Ethiopian's mouth were, "Here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" Marvin pointed out that Philip didn't interrogate the man to make sure his faith was good enough. He just baptized the guy. When Marvin had finished I got up and told the church that if anyone had any questions or wanted to talk I'd be there til everyone else went home. As I walked down the aisle the husband of our evangelism "test case" stopped me and said, "I have a question." I looked at him and he said, "why shouldn't I be baptized?"

Wow... that was easy. I told him he should and he told me that both he and his wife wanted to get baptized right then and there just like the Ethiopian guy. The water hadn't been heated up but that didn't phase them. "We're willing to get cold if you are Ed!" How could I say no to that? I let everyone know we were going to have a baptism and went to get the pool as ready as it was going to get, scooping dead spiders off the surface of the water. When everything was ready I went and asked them if they were ready to be baptized and he exclaimed in a loud voice, "HELL YES!" I looked around at my hero and the other super churchy people that had decided they wanted to try walking with people until they "got it" wondering how they'd react. I'll never forget, Marvin laughed out loud and said, "that's awesome!". I looked over at Judy's grandpa Dick who was about 90 years old at the time and he just smiled and shrugged his shoulders and said, "then let's do it..." and we went to the pool.

Once we got into the water I started with the husband. I asked him, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and your Savior?" He didn't even hesitate. "Yes!" I was thankful there wasn't a four letter word inserted with his declaration. And so I baptized him. Then his wife stepped up. The one who told me that she was checking into the whole "Jesus thing" since the "God thing" had worked out so well. I asked her if she believed that Jesus was the Son of God and her Savior. And she got this thoughtful look on her face and was quiet for what seemed to me an absolute eternity. I was panicking inside. I was praying inside. "HELP ME GOD. HELP ME GOD. HELP ME GOD... WHY DIDN'T I TELL HER WHAT I WAS GOING TO ASK BEFORE SHE GOT IN HERE? WHAT IF SHE SAYS 'NO'?"

And then something I'll never forget happened. Her face changed completely. She looked up at me and smiled and said, "yes... I do believe that Jesus is God's Son and my Savior." All I could think at the moment was, "THANK YOU GOD THANK YOU GOD THANK YOU GOD FOR SAVING MY BACON..." and I immediately dunked her before she could change her mind. But I've asked myself many times since that moment, what happened to her in those moments between my question about her faith in Jesus and her confession of belief? Do you know what I think happened?

Jesus opened her eyes. Just like He did for Cleopas and Mary after He walked with them from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He opened their eyes and they realized He had been walking with them all along. And as we stood in that freezing cold baptistry and she considered the most important question she would ever consider Jesus opened her eyes and she realized that while she thought it had been Ed and Judy and the rest of Riverside walking by her side for the last year or so it had actually been Jesus all along. It had even been Jesus before that when she thought it was a tree saving her from her addictions. Jesus had been there all along. And it changed her forever.

And now, I'm hooked on Emmaus Road evangelism. We may get some flack at Riverside from time to time from other churches and other Christians about the kind of people we let attend our church but we believe with all of our hearts that if Jesus was as patient with us as He was then who are we to be impatient with people that are still figuring Him out.

And that's the ultimate hope of Easter (imho).