

One credit card company uses as its slogan: “Membership has its privileges.” Most college and other advance degrees say something to the effect that this degree is awarded “with all rights and privileges pertaining thereunto.” (Whatever they may be!) We like rights and privileges. We like seeing signs that say “access restricted” and know that this doesn’t mean us because we have been granted access. The fourth day’s theme for VBS is: Jesus gives us the POWER to live forever. Or as I want to paraphrase it: *Jesus gives us the power to come before our God with boldness and with the assurance we are family—the right to live forever.* I like the way Eugene Peterson translates the first verse of the 145th Psalm in The Message. It speaks of our hope:

“I lift you high in praise, my god, O my King! and I will bless your name into eternity.”

Jesus gives us the power to live forever. This is a lesson learned on the Emmaus Road by two of his disciples. They are overcome with grief. Their world has been turned upside down by the events of the past days. This is a road that most of us have walked at one time or another in our lives. If only the loss of a hope or a dream. I recall being in Scotland one summer as the results of the “exams” were announced and sent out to graduating high school seniors. Now, your admittance to a college or university under their system does not depend on how well you did in high school but on how well you placed on your graduation exams. One young man interviewed said, “I wanted to be a dentist but I guess I’ll have to settle for an auto mechanic.” He had not scored well enough to get into any dental school. He hopes and dreams we gone.

The disciples had placed all their hopes in Jesus. Read again verse 21: “*We had hoped he was the one to rebuild Israel.*” They had their idea of how the Messiah would come and would rule. The view they had was limited to an earthly reign. The Kingdom would be reestablished, Rome would be gone and all would be well with the world. Now all that was lost in the events of Friday. Hope was lost due to a limited worldview.

I remember the story of a little boy who was asked to draw a picture of what he had seen on a recent field trip. He turned in a picture of knees! The extent of his worldview! This is where the two disciples stand. They had lost hope.

Even as Jesus joins them and talks with them they do not recognize him. Jesus gives a great Bible lesson, explaining the concept of the Messiah, beginning with Moses and going down through the Prophets. They listen but still do not comprehend who is walking with them, teaching them. Their grief dulls their senses. “We had hoped he was the one.”

As they reach the end of their journey it is growing late in the day and they encourage the stranger to stop and have dinner with them. They have to “urge” him to come in and stay. They have reached the end of their journey. They want the lesson to continue, please come and eat with us. As they gather around the table and as the bread is broken and blessed their eyes are opened—it is the Lord. The power of the resurrection is revealed and their hope is restored. There is hope but they are not sure what this hope is. What does the resurrection mean for the future?

The last step of faith, the power to live forever. We are still searching for the fountain of youth. Last year Americans spent billions of dollars seeking to look and feel younger. The word is that 60 is the new 40. Does that make 80 the new 60?? We try to recapture our youth. We want to extend our youthfulness, the days of our lives. Why? Are we not convinced of tomorrow? We believe but yet we still don’t know.

Our faith says that tomorrow will be better than today. But as strong as our faith is there is still a little of Thomas in us, “unless I see with my own eyes, feel with my own hands.” I am confronted with the question of life and death almost daily as a hospice chaplain. I hear people of strong faith and hope raise the question of immortality. People who have lived a life of great faith, and still there is the wonder...this is what I believe, but. Is this not where we often stand – Our trust is in Jesus, the promises, but.

The promise of the resurrection was misunderstood. The resurrection was not expected even though Jesus had spoken and taught about it. The two disciples report that some of the women even had visited the grave and returned with the story that it was empty. The women had a “vision” of angels but had not seen Jesus (they left before the whole story was told; some of the women had seen Jesus). Peter and John found the grave empty but had not see Jesus. The word was resurrection, but they are not sure what to believe. Their whole world is in an uproar. Who or what do we believe? The travel back to Emmaus is filled not only with grief but also with stories of resurrection.

Now they too have seen the Lord. They have no choice but to rush back to Jerusalem and tell the others of their experience on the road. Something is happening. Now they are even more unsure of tomorrow than they were as the day began. What does the resurrection mean to these faithful followers? We have seen the Lord. What do we do now?

The time between earth and heaven is not easy. Paul, as he writes to the Church in Philippi, echoes this sentiment: *‘I am torn between the two: the desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.’* Paul is concerned about what will happen after his death among those left behind. He struggles with his desires. He knows the promises, but... Is this not so often where our faith is? We know the promise: *“Today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43) – but...

Dallas Willard writes about our hope: *“It is assurance of the continuity of our lives under God and in this universe with Him that liberates us...The reason Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus was certainly because of the misery imposed upon humanity by failure to vividly see the reality of undying life in God—a misery overwhelmingly exemplified in the scene surround him at the moment.”*

We too are torn between earth and heaven. However, we still hold to the promise: *‘I lift you high, my God, O my King! and I will bless your name into Eternity.’* Or as Dallas Willard sums it up: *“Paradise is in session.”*

Willard, Dallas, *The Great Omission*, HarperOne, NY, NY 2006 (pp 223/224)