

Dear Friends

I don't know if you remember the Los Angeles riots (in the USA) some years ago. I remember watching an international news channel broadcasting the event and I was particularly captivated by a huge Sign outside the Airport building: Keep Hope Alive!

When we meet the two pilgrims in Luke 24, their flame of hope has gone out! It is a picture of the church at its very worst. They hoped for economic and political liberation. But on Good Friday, everything changed. The liberator became the victim. He had not resisted – and that they could not believe. The flame of hope got crushed. And as they speak to each other, they say: "We had hoped..." In our world today, it is easy to say: "We had hoped..." Disillusionment/fatigue can put the fire out. And when the fire goes out – we find ourselves saying: "We had hoped..." In these moments, we have two choices: To become prisoners of hopelessness, or we can allow ourselves to be pushed down with the crucified one – until we are connected with the true hope (Jesus).

Within the context of hopelessness, the two pilgrims are challenged to revise their view of what the Messiah is really like. Before the crucifixion, they had a triumphalist picture of the Messiah (like Superman – who would crush evil, and they would be on the winning side...). We could easily be seduced by this kind of triumphalist picture of Jesus. Jesus introduced them to another kind of Messiah (the greatest way is that of crucified love).

I am encouraged by the power of the living word of Christ that ignites and

restores the fire of Hope. The two give Jesus a clear picture of the gospel. But something is missing: they lack a personal Word from the Saviour. It was Oliver Wendell Holmes who once wrote in a letter to a friend, "There is a little plant called Reverence in the corner of my soul's garden." If we want to keep our spiritual fires burning, if we want to nurture that little plant in the garden of our souls called Reverence, we need to intentionally develop the habit of reading and engaging Scripture.

Notice the Sacramental way in which Jesus reveals Himself. No wonder the early church broke the bread together so often! There was once a member of a church who suddenly stopped attending worship after years of regularity. After a few weeks, the minister decided to visit him at his home. It was a chilly evening. The minister found the member home alone, relaxing before a roaring fire. Guessing that he knew the reason for the visit, the member invited the minister to have a seat across from him, also near the fireplace.

The minister settled into the overstuffed chair and began to stare into the fireplace without saying a word. After a few minutes, she reached out and took the fire tongs and carefully picked up a brightly burning ember, placing it on one side of the hearth all alone. Then she sat back in his chair in complete silence.

The host watched all of this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

The minister glanced at her watch and realised it was time to leave. She slowly stood up, picked up the cold dead ember and placed it back into the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

Not a word had been spoken since their initial greeting but as the minister put her hand on the doorway, the member gently reached out and touched the minister's arm to make her pause. With tears trickling down a cheek, the member said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially the fiery sermon. I shall see you in church Sunday."

The fire is ignited again in our togetherness at the Lord's Table. And so, this is a call to go and find those that are not at the table – to bring them back – so that the fire can be ignited again.

The pilgrims got up. Hope gets us back up on our feet again. The Church of Jesus Christ is MISSION (we are a people who are sent). The greatest gift that we can give our world - as a fired-up people and as witnesses of the Living Christ – is the gift of hope!

We can choose to become prisoners of hopelessness or agents of love and hope! We can do this by choosing the way of crucified love. Also, we are invited into a personal relationship with Him as we regularly engage with Scripture and as we sit together at His table.

And then we are called to get up and go into this world to share this message of love and hope with those outside of these walls.

Dear friends, my message to you this Easter season is: "Let's give a little love, have a little hope and make this world a little better" (Zigi Marley)

Peace and Grace

Romeo

*Romeo.*