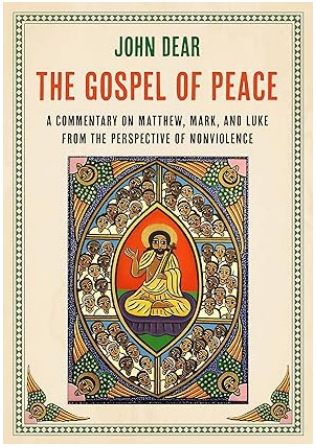
**Excerpt Page from John Dear**
**Easter 3A — April 19, 2026**

We were hoping!




"We were hoping he would change everything. We were hoping this prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people would redeem Israel. We were hoping God would intervene and justice would come. We were hoping humanity would live in peace. We were hoping in Jesus of Nazareth. Once we had hope, but now we have no hope."

This moment is critical for Luke. He wants us to feel the despair of the two downcast disciples. They have hit the rock bottom of total despair, of no hope whatsoever. Once there was hope; now we know there is no hope. Our best hope was killed. All hope is gone. It was all a dream. He was mighty and great, but they killed him, he's gone, he's dead; the movement he started is over, there's nothing we can do, end of story.

Luke wants his community — and us his readers — to feel their despair and recognize that same despair, that no-hope-whatsoever, in us. For starters, we can recall the past pluperfects of our own lives, the times we said, "We were hoping. . . ."

Think of those moments of despair when we said, "We were hoping . . ." that life would get easier; that the world would get better; that our politicians would become compassionate and wise; that justice would flourish; that food, clean water, healthcare, and education would be available to every person; that the nuclear threat would disappear; that racism, sexism, and gun violence would vanish; that peace would rule the day; and that everyone might serve God's reign of peace. We were hoping that humanity would learn from past mistakes and create more just, more nonviolent social structures and nations. We were hoping that the church would become more welcoming, more peacemaking, more celebratory, a place where God sends us forth to proclaim God's reign of peace. Alas for such high hopes. We were hoping . . . but no longer.

The stranger listens to them and to us, and then he speaks up. "How foolish you are!"

"What?"

"How slow you are to believe all that the prophets spoke!"

"What?"

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

"Was it not necessary . . . ?" we say in response to the stranger's odd question. "The world is brimming with injustice, violence, starvation, killing, and warfare. We hang on the brink of nuclear war; billions suffer and die in extreme poverty, and climate chaos is roaring down upon us. Meanwhile, with a few notable exceptions, the church has sided with the status quo of wealth, nationalism, and domination, justifying and blessing war in your name. The way of nonviolence has been thoroughly rejected. Greed and violence rule the world. Death has won out. Things are worse now than during your days on earth."

We might think "these things," and the two downcast disciples might have wanted to argue with the stranger, but he will not hear of it. He will not cooperate with despair. This unusual person who refers to the prophets seems filled with hope. He is hope personified. He practiced total nonviolence, built a movement of nonviolence, challenged the ruling structures of violence, was killed for it, and is now alive and well, raised from the dead, out and about, carrying on his underground grassroots movement. (Note that Luke's reference to a suffering Messiah is the only time that phrase occurs in

the Christian scriptures. This image refers to the prophet Isaiah and his vision of the Suffering Servant in chapter 53.)

So the stranger explains his position to the dumbfounded disciples, and to us. The risen Jesus does the most astonishing thing: he holds a Bible study right there on the road to Emmaus.

"Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures," Luke writes. We don't realize it, but Luke is slowly teaching his community and us that the risen Jesus appears to us when we break open the word together, and when we break bread together.

Thus, the risen, nonviolent Jesus explains all over again the story of salvation. He reviews the journey of faith in the God of peace and progressive nonviolence in Moses through the prophets and the Psalms to himself. He tutors them on the biblical path of nonviolent resistance — the very path that leads to the cross. And then to new life and glory. He invites the two of them — and the rest of us — to understand the wisdom of the paschal mystery as the doorway to peace, the fulfillment of active nonviolence, the way into God's reign of universal love.

The Christ has not failed his mission, he explains. Death and empire are tumbling down. The culture of violence, injustice, and war is crumbling. The old world is falling away. Nonviolence works. It is the way forward. The God of love and peace is alive and glorified. The new realm of God's peace and justice is at hand. Even creation will be renewed. Suffering accepted in love, in the pursuit of truth and justice, bears immeasurable fruit, if one only believes and holds out for the long haul. As Dr. King would later say: truth crushed to earth will rise again. The Christ lives on. The revolution of nonviolence continues. The grassroots movement will spread across the planet and down through history and disarm and transform everyone!

It's as if he said to them: active, creative, loving nonviolence through grassroots, people-power movements — from Jonah and Isaiah through the early church to Francis and Clare to Gandhi and Dorothy Day, from the Abolitionists and the Suffragists to the civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid movement, from the feminist movement to the environmental movement, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter — is giving birth to a new world of justice, disarmament, equality, and environmental sustainability. This way of nonviolence, through the paschal mystery of steadfast resistance and truth-telling, becomes contagious and wins out, bears good fruit, and leads to new breakthroughs for God's reign of peace here and now. This way of Jesus works. It always works, if we are faithful to the end.

Excerpt from John Dear's *The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence* (Orbis Books, 2024), pages 391-393.