SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — April 19, 2026

"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." – Luke 24:21a

We had hoped. How many times have you had that experience in your life? You're hoping for a positive outcome with an illness (like battling cancer), or a relationship (trying to save a marriage), or a job. But it doesn't come through. Worse, you experience a loss instead of a gain. We had hoped. And now hope is gone.

One of Pastor Paul's we-had-hoped moments: In 1984 Aunt Kay was diagnosed with cancer and died by the end of August (at only 42 years of age). I had prayed for a miracle cure as hard as I ever prayed for anything. We had hoped. At the end of August hope seemed gone.

There's a strange irony to these disciples on the road to Emmaus: they voiced their we-had-hoped experience precisely to the one they had hoped in, but they don't recognize him. Then, when they finally do recognize him in the breaking of bread, in fellowship, he vanishes. The Risen Jesus keeps vanishing until he Ascends. Then comes Pentecost when the Spirit of the One is poured out on the Many. Maybe looking for *the* One is a misplaced hope in the first place.

When I look back on 1984, a special place Aunt Kay has for me is that she was the first in her family of alcoholics to receive treatment, and then to learn to live sober in Alcoholics Anonymous. By February of 1985, my Dad followed his little sister's example and went into treatment for the first time. "First time" because he relapsed several times over nine years until finally taking his last drink in 1994.

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

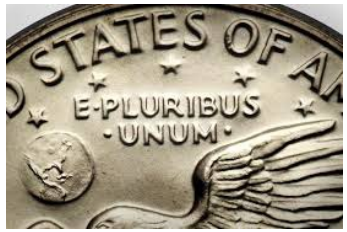
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

It is in thinking about this sermon this week that I think I've had an insight into why he kept relapsing. The Twelve Steps of A. A. require faith in a "Higher Power." Step 1 is to admit that alcohol holds power over you. Step 2 is to look to a Higher Power than alcohol. Step 3 is to surrender to your Higher Power. Many come to A. A. not believing in God, so they can be put-off by the Higher Power talk. But they are assured that it's not about the One God they may have been taught. The Higher Power is experienced in the Many. In the group. In caring for one another and supporting each other to live sober.

My Dad, son and grandson of Lutheran pastors, was hung up on the Higher Power in terms of the One God. He had trouble experiencing the Higher Power through the Many until persisting in A.A. for a few years. His inadequate "theology" held him back from achieving sobriety.

Urgent point for all of us: I believe we were all raised with this inadequate theology. Because after 15 centuries of the Church allied with Empire, we have come to think of God more in terms of authoritarian empires in which we're trained to think of God like Caesar. If we hope to be redeemed from Caesar, than God must be a bigger and badder Caesar. It's the *nationalistic* way of thinking about God.



The disciples on the rode to Emmaus were also stuck in this nationalistic way of conceiving God as the *One* who would redeem them. They couldn't recognize Jesus as Messiah because they were still stuck in looking for *the* one. It wasn't until he kept disappearing on them, then ascended, then poured out the Holy Spirit that they could see God not as *the* One but as the one-from-many. It wasn't until they began to experience redemption in the life they made together in Christ's spirit. Today's First Reading comes from Peter's Pentecost sermon, after which we read:

> Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need (Acts 2:43-45).

Our country has fallen once again for the false God of hoping for one person to redeem us. But we have the right motto to guide us: e pluribus unum, "one from many." We need to know God as the one from many in loving community. Our hope is not in one person but in the community with the Three-in-One God's loved poured out on us. Think Acts 2:43-45. Think the people of Minneapolis this past January. E pluribus unum.