

Watching the Credits Roll

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Luke 24:44-53

"...everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

Movement 1 – The Beginning of the End

They said that it was over. They told them to let it go, to go back to living, to come back to reality. They said that it was over. It was time to move on.

We've heard this before. We've heard these words of finality, these words that have little place for hope. I wonder if the disciples heard these words on the day that Christ was crucified. I wonder if they were mouthing these words as they stood and stared. Can you imagine the disciples standing there gaping, staring and wondering if this was the end, and if this was all that they were going to get? Can you see them standing there around the tomb, around the cross staring and wondering if this really was all that they were going to receive? Like watching the credits roll at the end of a movie where they couldn't believe and couldn't accept the ending. Like the end of *Million Dollar Baby*, or *The Departed* you stare and say this can't be the end, where is the hope and the happy ending? Yet the person next to you tells you to stand up and move, your friend pulls at your sleeve and you realize that you are being shuffled out the door. The rest of the world told the disciples that it was over, that the show had reached its finale, and that it was time to move on. There was little room for hope, they said that it was over.

Can you imagine the disciples fixed on that ending, fixed on the unbelievable, and fixed on the finality? Maybe they were paralyzed, couldn't move, couldn't get up and just found themselves watching the credits roll. It was like the end of a tragic movie, like watching the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, or *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, you watch the characters each die in their own tragic way and you sit and stare and watch the credits roll. You have been pulled into the lives of these characters, you have been intertwined with their hopes and their struggles, and now you can't believe that this is the end, you can't believe that this is the final scene and you find yourself staring in disbelief, watching the credits roll.

We reach this point in our lives, we reach this stage in our lives when we find ourselves not believing our experiences, not satisfied with our living situation and we look in disbelief at ourselves, at the movie of our lives and we watch the credits roll as we realize that we will live with this medical ailment forever, that we will struggle financially forever, that the grief we are living with will be with us forever and we fall into a state of shock as we are told that this is it, and it is over. Our child will never change, you will never fully overcome your addiction, your legs will always ache, and you will never be able to overcome your fear. It is an acceptance of a loss, it is embracing grief. Remember the movie *Mrs. Doubtfire*? In that movie, Robin William's character could not accept that he was divorced and lied, cheated and manipulated to try to reclaim a lost marriage. He could not accept that it was over.

Maybe we find ourselves dreaming as the credits roll and the finality sets in. Maybe we find ourselves dreaming of a sequel, we dream of a movie of redemption, but we are told that it is over, and we find ourselves standing with the disciples at the cross and the tomb, we find ourselves standing with the disciples in despair watching credits roll.

We face hopelessness in our lives. We wrestle with hopelessness, and try to find some hope. Yet the world calls us to give in, to give up and to live life with a quiet submission accepting our fate, the fate of death, the fate of the finality of life. It is over, we are told, it is time

to walk out of the theater, to throw away your empty bag of popcorn, and get back to living. Go back to the boats and fish, go back to your towns and live, but don't be stuck staring at a screen reminding you that the hope you once had is finished and is over.

Movement 2 – The End of the World

You can look at the world and struggle to find hope. You can look at the world and try to find a little space for optimism, for hope and for dreams but that space seems illusive and far off. Maybe, when you were a child you dreamed of making the world a better place, of changing the world. Maybe you had that movie playing in your head, but now, reality sets in and you wonder if it is over.

The disciples had a dream in their minds. It was a dream of liberation, a dream of freedom, and a dream of living in a time of glory. As they walked with Christ, the dream grew, the hope grew that soon things would change, that things would improve and that Israel would become a better place. There were times that the dream felt so real, and the promise seemed tangible. Yet it didn't come to fruition. It was Rome that crucified Christ, Rome was still in power, the principalities of the temple were still corrupt, the poor were still living in abject poverty and the rich were still hoarding their wealth. Things did not get better and did not show any hope to improve. Not only is their relationship with Christ over, not only is their whirlwind tour of God's glory over, but their dreams of the world improving are over as well. And we find the disciples staring at the sky, looking up at an ascended Lord and not much to show for all of the trust and the risks they have taken. Maybe someone from afar yells at them, let it go, come back to reality and keep your head out of the clouds. It is hopeless. The credits are rolling for the disciples and for the world. The hope for the world is gone and over; this is what we have, what we have to work with, and it is as good as it is going to get.

We have had dreams and those dreams have been shattered. In the late 1800s and early 1900s the great thinkers of the Western World, Hegel, Marx, Hume and others believed that society would improve and continue to improve. They looked at the advancements of the world, they considered the current writings, ideas and thoughts that were germinating and they had hope, a profound hope, that the world would get better and better because of the work of humanity. Yet something happened in 1914 and again in 1939; World War I and World War II. These wars shut down the optimism and the hope of the great thinkers of the western world. These wars brought to the fore the brutality of humanity and the evil that humans were capable of. From these conflicts came the dark existentialism of thinkers like Sartre and Camus who claimed that we live in this world and then we die and there is no point in the large picture. It was a picture of a world that was finished and over. It is a picture with little hope.

It is an experience that is not unique but is shared by many. Many would agree that the world is a mess, and there is little hope in changing or saving it. We watch movies like Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth*, we read of a growing crime rate, we hear of children dying because they lack basic health care and our despair grows. Then we hear of corruption in business and politics, we hear that the candidate who shows the most T.V. ads has the best chance in winning, we see trends continue toward more and more consumption and we wonder if this is it for the world. The zoologist and philosopher Desmond Morris once said, "We are, to put it mildly, in a mess, and there is a strong chance that we shall have exterminated ourselves by the end of the century. Our only consolation will have to be that, as a species, we have had an exciting term of office."

When I was at college, we were fed an idealist kind of hope that we could make the world a better place, we were told to "think globally and act locally." Yet if thousands of people

in my community are going to Wal-Mart, and I avoid going in order to “act locally,” am I really making a difference? If I go to a homeless shelter and try to feed people I know most of them will be back tomorrow, and I ask myself, did I make a difference? Where is the hope for the world? Where is the possibility that the world will get better. Where is the hope for our lives?

So maybe we can find ourselves with the disciples wondering about our dreams for the world, wondering if they are lost, and if we can no longer make a difference. Maybe it feels like the movie for our life and the movie for the world is rolling the finishing credits and all we can do is again sit and stare, not believing that this is it for us and for the world.

Movement 3 – The Brazen Hope of the Christian

Yet the disciples continue to praise. The disciples know that there is a sense of hopelessness that hangs over the world. The disciples have lived in the angst and the ennui, and yet we find them at the end of Luke praising. We find them full of joy, full of grace and praising God. The disciples continue to praise.

They have seen the end, but they have also seen a new beginning. They have experienced the death of Christ but they have also experienced the resurrection. Even after he has again left them, even after the ascension and they are left alone in the world, they stand, watching the credits continue to roll because they are waiting for and expecting something else, something more, and they continue to praise. They are waiting for that hint, that taste, that promise that this is not the end, and things are not over. The world is still in disarray, life is still chaotic, yet the disciples continue to praise. It is a brazen and brash hope with which they are filled. It is an illogical hope with which they celebrate. The disciples continue to praise.

In the midst of the despair of our own life, surrounded by the trials of our life, can we continue to praise? Can we continue to have the brazen hope which the disciples display? Can we continue to praise, to believe, and to go forward regardless of the darkness that the world offers? Can we continue to have hope and praise?

It is not an unheard of thing to see Christians with hope in this day and age. It is not unheard of to find Christians in a naive state of believing things will get better even when they are terminally ill. Or Christians who really believe that it is possible to form a community that works on different standards and different ideals than the rest of the world. You may know of churches that, when the neighborhood was changing, and when all of the upstanding, “white” residents were moving to a “safer” neighborhood decided to stay even though the odds were against them. You may know of churches that displayed this kind of profound hope.

It is a hope that the theologian Jurgen Moltmann describes as one placed on a future promise. The disciples are resting in the promise of Christ, in the future hope that Christ will return and in that hope they continue to praise. From whence does this hope come? Where can we find such absurd hope?

Can we have the same hope that as we watch the credits roll, it does not mean that this is the end for our life or for the world or for the church? Maybe there will be a hint at the end of the credits to what is coming next. Maybe there will be a word, or a character, or one more thing to give us hope. We are told this is the end; we are encouraged to live as if this is it, but we hold onto a hope that there is more, and this is not the end. We can continue to praise.

Movement 4 – Hope of a Past Fulfillment

We have a hope in what has been done. It is a hope that starts with Easter. It is a hope that looks to the resurrection, to that great and glorious day when God shattered the barrier of

death, the barrier of despair, the barrier of our own brokenness and give us a new hope, a profound hope based on what has been done.

This is a hope that comes from our ancestors, from what has been done. It is a hope resting on the fulfillment of scriptures. W. Pannenberg describes this as a proleptic hope; a hope from the past that effects our present and our future. The disciples experienced this hope first when they saw the risen Lord. On that great day, they knew that all of their expectations of the world had been shattered. On that great day, they knew that those who said it was over were wrong. They could now live with this hope because Christ has been raised from the dead. As they looked to the sky, as they remembered Jesus' words of promise, they held onto them with perseverance because they still remember Easter. The event of the past gave them hope for the future.

In the passage today, you can imagine the disciples walking with Jesus, carrying this hope and living this hope. You can imagine the disciples looking at the world and seeing, not what was there, but what could possibility be. Their vision came from the hope of the resurrection. Christ shows them how this hope has been promised and written about from the Law of Moses, to the prophets and the psalms. Christ opens their minds to the promises of scripture and the ways in which that promise has become real. The disciples can praise God for what God has done.

It reminds me of Daniel who had hope in God when he was going to be thrown into the Lion's den. Daniel looked not to a God who yet had miracles to do, but to the God of his ancestors who had already done so much. When Moses declares to the Israelites oppressed in Egypt he came to them declaring the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses was reminding them of what God has done in the past to find hope for today.

We can look at our own past and find hope. In a time when it seems that churches are losing significance, that churches are dying, we can remember that there was a time when Christians were persecuted. We can remember that there was a time when worship had to occur in secret, when Christians were sent to the arenas. Yet the church still grew, people still gave their lives to Christ and hope continued. We can look back to the resurrection, we can look back to the examples of those who have gone before us and we can find hope. It is like the sun shining behind us, on our back, showing us the path that others have taken and that we also can take.

We have a hope because Christ has been raised; we have a hope because God has already beaten death. We have a hope because of that first Easter, and we can shout our praise because of that hope. We have a hope in what has been done.

Movement 5 – Hope of a Present Promise

We have a hope because of what is being done. The disciples have a hope because of what is being done. They shout their praise; they worship because of the new thing that is to be proclaimed that is happening here and now. They are experiencing joy in the here and now, surrounded by the skeptics, surrounded by the naysayer pointing at the troubles of the world, the disciples still praise.

There are those who are pointing at the despair of the world and are saying that it is over, that all is lost, and that the disciples should just go home. But the disciples respond that here and now repentance and the forgiveness of sins are offered to all the people and to all the nations. There are those who are pointing at the falleness of humanity, saying that there are so many who seem to have rejected God. Yet the disciples reply that they can still receive God's grace and forgiveness. Right now, grace is offered. Right now, forgiveness is offered. It is a hope in what is

happening, and what is being done. The disciples are praising because they know that if one repents, if one turns to God with a feeling of guilt and shame they will receive mercy and forgiveness. The hope they have is not just in what occurred on Easter, but also in what is now happening because of Easter. It is a hope in what is being done.

We also can have that hope. We can have that present hope in what is happening right now. You can go to a restaurant and be hopeful for a good meal because you have eaten there before, and you remember from past experiences that the food is good. But when you order the food, then your hope changes because you know that now the food is being prepared. The food is on its way, and you can find hope. It is a payday kind of hope; a kind of hope one has when one is expecting their check today. It is a hope when the sun begins to shine, you know that the ground will warm up because of what is happening. We have this present hope as well.

It is a hope that repentance and the forgiveness of sins are indeed to be proclaimed to the nations and to us. It is a hope that forgiveness is offered right now. If you were to take a moment now and ask God for mercy, then you would be forgiven. You don't have to wait for a certain day, it doesn't have to be on Sunday, but any day can you receive grace and forgiveness. This is a reason to offer praise; this is a reason to have hope in the here and now, to have hope in today.

People may say that the world is a mess that institutions are a mess and we should abandon hope. Yet we can offer hope that forgiveness is offered, it is there if people will only take it. No matter where they are, what they've done, forgiveness is there. Paul had this hope when he went to the Gentiles. It was a hope that the covenant was opened up to all the nations, and so he preached to all the nations. He lived into this hope as he went to Corinth, to Galatia, and to Rome. He lived into this hope as he reached out to non-Jews and shared with them the message that through Jesus grace is available for all. Paul knew about, lived and experienced this present, this active hope.

It is a hope that shines down upon us, its rays falling directly upon us, lighting the ground upon which we walk. We have a hope in what God is doing here and now, and that gives us cause to praise.

Movement 6 – Hope in the Future

We have a hope in what God has promised to do. We have a hope in what is coming, in what is next, in what God has promised for us in the future. We are looking to the horizon, looking for the next thing, waiting for the end of the credits so we can see the sneak peak of the hope promised. We have a hope in what God has promised to do.

When Jesus leaves the disciples, he tells them to stay in Jerusalem because they will be clothed with power. In John he promises them that there will be a time and a day when he will return. So the disciples are worshiping and praising not just because of what has happened, not just because of what is happening, but because of what is going to happen. They know that this is not the end; they know that it is not over, and they offer praise. The second chapter, the sequel is coming, and for that they have hope and they praise.

You have had this kind of hope as well. A hope that something new and different is going to happen. It is a hope that something profound is going to occur. You have had this hope as well. It reminds me of the Israelites in the wilderness, they were given a hope that soon they would reach the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey and things would be better. I can imagine that such a hope would give them strength to continue through the harsh conditions of the weather.

When we are told that it is over, we do not need to fall into despair. When we are told that the world is a mess and always will be a mess, we do not need to listen or give into such thoughts. When we are told that humanity will always be broken, that churches will always have problems, we can still hold onto a hope that something is coming, that something is going to happen that will change all of our expectations. The sun is shining ahead of us, calling us and giving us hope. We will be clothed with grace, we will experience God's glory. We can have hope in what God is going to do.

I continue to work with the church because I know there will be a day when, through the grace of God, this community will be the kingdom of heaven that we all proclaim. I work with the broken, the hurting, the suffering not because I think that I can fix everyone and everything, but because I know there will be a time and a day when all grief will pass, when all suffering will pass, and I want to share that hope. The line of people in need, the line of people who need our help goes out the door and down the street, but I will roll up my sleeves and help anyways, because I know there will be a time when that line will end.

It reminds me of a famous sermon I heard from Tony Campolo. It was at a preaching contest, and one of the younger, upstart pastors went up to preach. He preached a long, well thought out, well reasoned, emotional sermon. He brought the people through highs and lows and back again. It was a very good sermon. He went back to his seat, walking past the next, older, seasoned pastor, winked at him and sat down feeling pretty good about himself. He was sure that no one could top his message. But then this old, seasoned pastor stood up, went to the pulpit and stood there. He waited until everyone was looking right at him, staring at him, and he said slowly and deliberately,

“It’s Friday.”

He said it again, “It’s Friday.”

“It’s Friday, but...”

And then he waited and the congregation held onto his breath waiting as well

“SUNDAY’S COMING”

And the congregation erupted shouting, praising, and cheering. And the old pastor patted the young pastor on the head and sat down.

That sermon is our future hope. It may be Friday, but we can praise on Friday, we can praise in the dark hour of our life because Sunday is coming. Sunday is coming, the Lord is coming and we can have hope and we can praise.

We have hope because Sunday has come, we have hope because Sunday is here and we have hope because Sunday is coming. Live into the grace and the peace of such a promise. Live into the hope and the joy of such a promise. Live into hope of what Christ has done, of what Christ is doing, and of what Christ is about to do.

AMEN