

Reflections, Reviews and Resources for Spiritual Formation

But We Had Hoped: Death, Resurrection and Spiritual Formation

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The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is one of my favorite stories in the bible. The disappointment of expectations these two disciples faced - not just for themselves, but for their hopes and dreams for their people and even the world is familiar, even more this Lent than ever before.

I have been a Christ follower for 53 years. And I have become convinced that life with Christ involves a series of deaths and resurrections. And the deaths feel like death. Death of an imagination of how "spiritual" I would be. Death of dreams of what we would accomplish. Death of ministries, and of hopes of how prayers would be answered, of expectations of myself and other Christians. Actual deaths of beloved friends.

Our formation in Christ is a series of deaths and resurrections. It is tempting to make spiritual formation a program of progress. As people who study, practice, and teach formation, please watch out for this. It can so easily become a program of self improvement - and then it is not formation in Christ at all.

When you, or someone you accompany in this journey finds themselves facing a death and no longer able to imagine how God might bring life out of this hopeless place - don't try to talk them out of it. Instead, be on the lookout. Be on the lookout for the Risen Jesus in disguise.

"We identify very easily with the disciple in these resurrection stories. We are meant to, for these stories are not naïve reports of 'what happened': they are written out of the faith and life of the church as it experienced the presence of the risen Christ... The Emmaus story is one of the best examples of all. Jesus is with the disciples all along the way, tender, encouraging, patient, loving, opening the scriptures. Yet they cannot realize it. They cannot see how the crashing failure could possibly be part of the plan. They voice their consternation and disillusionment: 'we had been hoping... But now...' It is the same with us in our spiritual programs. The cross and the resurrection throw us into consternation and overturn our value systems. We had hoped... We had our plans about growth in prayer and holiness, but now...! To us also the Lord says, how dense you are, how slow of heart! Ought not Christ... and ought not you? Your plans were far too small and mean; let go of them."

Maria Boulding, *Marked for Life: Prayer in the Easter Christ*.