

Connected by Hope

Ambassadors of Hope

[Luke 24:13–35 | Romans 5:1–5]

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For more than a century, people in Korea have sung a song known as The Song of Hope.

Interestingly, its melody did not originate in Korea. It came from a collection of Western Christian hymns before making its way to East Asia in the early twentieth century. In Korea, new lyrics were written by a Christian in 1910, and a few years later the song was popularized by a folk singer. As the melody found a new home, it also came to carry the history, sorrow, and longing of the Korean people.

Although it is called The Song of Hope, it sounds more like a lament than a celebration. For people living under Japanese colonial rule, hope was never a word to be spoken lightly.

The first verse begins with these words:

"In this troubled world, what is your hope?"

More than one hundred years later, that question still speaks to us.

What is our hope? Where do we place our hope?

We often think of hope as something that belongs to the future. We hope because we believe tomorrow may be better than today. We hope because we trust that today's suffering will eventually come to an end. In this sense, hope easily becomes another word for optimism.

Yet optimism alone cannot sustain us.

The world we inhabit continually confronts us with realities that resist easy hope. Wars continue to devastate nations. Climate change threatens the future of creation. Poverty and inequality continue to deepen, while hatred and discrimination divide communities. Human life is too often measured by profit rather than dignity, and many continue to suffer under systems that place economic success above human flourishing.

In such a world, hope cannot simply mean believing that things will somehow improve. If hope depends only on favorable circumstances, sooner or later it will collapse beneath the weight of reality.

The Gospel, however, speaks of a different kind of hope.

Today's Gospel tells the story of two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Only days before, they had placed all their hope in Jesus. They believed that he would redeem Israel and establish God's reign. Instead, they watched him die on a cross, and with his death the future they had imagined seemed to disappear as well.

It is on this road of disappointment that the risen Christ comes near and walks beside them. Yet they do not recognize him. When Jesus asks what they are discussing, Luke tells us that they stop walking. Standing still with downcast faces, they answer:

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

Those few words reveal the depth of their grief. Their hope had become something that belonged to the past. Even the report of the empty tomb could not awaken faith within them. It was simply another bewildering story added to their disappointment.

Jesus, however, does not leave them there.

Before explaining anything, he walks with them. Before correcting them, he listens to them. He patiently opens the Scriptures, inviting them to see their lives within the larger story of God's faithfulness. Finally, when he takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them, their eyes are opened. Only then do they say to one another,

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road and opening the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

The story of Emmaus reveals something profound about Christian hope.

Hope did not begin with the disciples.

It began with Christ.

The disciples did not rediscover hope because they became stronger or more courageous. Hope was restored because the Risen Lord sought them out. He entered their disappointment, walked beside them, listened to their grief, and revealed himself in the breaking of the bread. Before they found hope again, they first discovered that they had never been abandoned.

The Apostle Paul expresses this same truth in his letter to the Romans. At first, his words seem to describe a familiar progression: “Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” We often read this passage as though hope were simply the reward for perseverance—as if, if we endure long enough, hope will eventually appear.

But Paul immediately turns our attention away from ourselves.

He writes:

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5)

Here we discover the true foundation of Christian hope.

Hope is not the achievement of human resilience. It is God’s gift. It is born from the love that God has already poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Even in suffering, we are not abandoned. Even in uncertainty, we are held in God’s faithful love.

The resurrection of Christ is the clearest witness to that truth. At the cross, it seemed that violence, hatred, and death had spoken the final word. Yet God raised Jesus from the dead, declaring that death is not the end, that hatred is not stronger than love, and that despair will never overcome God's promise.

Christian hope, therefore, is not wishful thinking about a better tomorrow. It is the confidence that the God who raised Christ from the dead continues to love the world today and refuses to abandon it. Because God’s love remains with us, hope does not disappoint us. Rather, this hope transforms the way we see the world.

The two disciples did not remain where they were. As soon as they recognized the risen Christ, they turned around and returned to Jerusalem. The city itself had not changed. The empire still ruled with violence. The cross still stood as a reminder of suffering and fear. The uncertainty of the future remained exactly as before. What had changed was not the world around them but the way they now saw and lived within it. Having encountered the love of God in the risen Christ, they could no longer remain isolated in their disappointment. Hope drew them back into community, back into relationship, and back into God's mission for the world.

Hope never isolates us from the pain of the world. On the contrary, it draws us more deeply into it. Because God has not abandoned the world, those who trust in God's love cannot abandon one another. The love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit always moves outward. It calls us to remain where others turn away, to seek reconciliation where division seems inevitable, and to stand alongside those whose dignity has been denied.

The same hope continues to speak into Korean society today.

Our society still carries deep wounds. The legacy of national division remains, while new divisions continue to emerge through political polarization, conflicts between generations, and tensions between women and men. Many people still experience discrimination because of their social status, their identity, or simply because they stand at the margins of society. Too often, we witness workers losing their lives because safety has been sacrificed for economic gain, while public tragedies leave lasting scars on our communities and raise painful questions about justice, responsibility, and the value of human life.

Yet these stories do not tell the whole truth.

Alongside these wounds, another story quietly continues to unfold. There are people who gather peacefully in public squares, believing that dialogue is stronger than hatred and that peace is stronger than violence. Churches stand beside dismissed workers, holding prayer services in the streets and accompanying them in their long struggle to recover their dignity. Communities remain with grieving families long after public attention has faded. Countless ordinary people prepare meals, offer shelter, share resources, and quietly stand beside neighbors they have never met before.

None of these actions can erase injustice overnight. They do not immediately heal every wound or overcome every division. Yet each of them bears witness to something greater than us. Whenever people refuse to abandon one another, whenever compassion becomes stronger than indifference, and whenever reconciliation is chosen over revenge, the love of God poured into human hearts becomes visible. Hope is no longer an abstract idea about the future; it becomes a way of life in the present.

Perhaps this is one of the gifts that the Korean Church has received through its own history. Having lived through colonization, war, division, and repeated moments of social crisis, we have learned that prayer cannot be separated from compassion, nor faith from the pursuit of human dignity. To pray for God's kingdom is also to stand beside those who suffer, to seek justice where life has been diminished, and to keep building bridges where the world continues to build walls.

The Korean Church has learned to discover hope in the midst of suffering. That experience resonates deeply with the stories of churches around the world that have endured their own pain and struggles. Though our histories are different, we are bound together as one Body of

Christ, called to sing the song of hope together. This is why communities such as EMS are so precious. They remind us that hope is never carried alone but always shared.

The member churches of EMS across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have walked this path together, sharing a hope rooted in the love of God. Mission within EMS is not a one-way movement. Rather, it is a fellowship in which every church gives and receives, teaches and learns, encourages and is encouraged. As these churches share their stories across cultures and continents, they discover that the same Holy Spirit is already at work among them, drawing them into deeper communion in Christ.

One church bears witness to hope in the midst of war. Another experiences the Lord's grace in poverty. Another cares for God's creation in the face of the climate crisis. Another proclaims reconciliation where conflict has endured for generations. These stories are different, yet they all belong to the same Gospel. Together they remind us that Christian hope has never been entrusted to a single church. It has been entrusted to the whole Body of Christ.

The Song of Hope that I mentioned at the beginning was later given new lyrics by Christians.

The original song asked:

“In this troubled world, what is your hope?”

The new version asked a different question:

“In this troubled world, what is our calling?”

And the lyrics that followed offered a simple and beautiful answer:

“Among faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love. Let us love one another. Keeping our Lord's commandment, let us love one another.”

God's love has given us hope, and that hope has grown into a calling.

For Christians, hope is no longer simply about waiting for a better future. It is about choosing how we live here and now. Because of this hope, we are able to remain where others walk away, to seek reconciliation between where the world chooses division, and to bear one another's burdens with patience, courage, and compassion.

The risen Christ is still walking the road to Emmaus with us.

It is my sincere prayer that we, as Ambassadors of Hope, will continue to walk this road together, sharing both the tears and the joys of the world.

Amen.