

Swiss churches

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CHRIST IS RISEN

Darkness, misery, unutterable sadness, the extinction of all hope. Life no longer seems worth living. Have you, in a time of great loss or disappointment, ever experienced such anguish?

If you have, you will understand something of the feelings of two men who, long ago, were making their way home from Jerusalem to their village. They walked with heavy steps. And as they went they talked. They talked of the friend they had had for three years. This friend was no ordinary man. He was a prophet. He spoke from God. He performed great works of healing and compassion. He was loved by the common people. But more than that: The two men, along with many others, had come to believe that he was not only a prophet but a Liberator. He was none other than the Messiah, sent by God, and whose coming the prophets of old had foretold. He would free his people from the oppression of foreigners. Soon the land would cease to be defiled by their presence and the wilderness would blossom as the rose.

And then something unbelievably terrible had happened. The authorities had acted against the prophet. He had been betrayed by one of his followers, arrested, dragged through a travesty of a trial and handed over to a Roman execution squad. He had died a horrible death. With him, hope had been murdered. It was as though a great light had shone for a brief span and then had been callously put out.

Small wonder then that the two friends looked grave as they walked. It was three days since the prophet's death and every waking moment since that time their thoughts had been full of the dreadful event. Nor did they find any relief in the weird story they had heard that morning about some women going to the tomb where he had been laid and seeing, not his body, but a vision of angels.

As they thus walked and spoke, another man began to walk behind them. Presently he caught up with them and said: "What are you talking about as you walk. You look so miserable." Astounded by his ignorance they stopped in their tracks and one of them whose name was Cleopas, said: "Are you the only person staying in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened these last few days?" "What things?" asked the

stranger. So they told him the whole story.

The stranger listened and then replied: "How foolish you are and slow to believe what the prophets have said! Don't you see that Messiah had to suffer these things before entering his glory?"

And as the three of them continued their way together, he began to talk about the Scriptures and what they had to say about the Messiah. In fact he gave them what might be called a private Bible study. He began at the beginning, in the book of Genesis, and went right on to the end of the sacred writings.

He was not talking to men who were ignorant of the Scriptures. All pious Jews knew them well. But as he came to each passage, his explanation shed a new and thrilling light upon it.

Now I do not know for certain which passages he expounded to them. But I would guess that he started with the mysterious words God spoke to the serpent in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

Did he go on to speak of Abraham who was promised that through his descendant all mankind was to be blessed? He must have mentioned the great deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, and especially the lamb sacrificed by each family in order that their firstborn child should live, just as Messiah had to die so that those who believe in him should be delivered from the slavery of sin.

He may have alluded to the bronze serpent which Moses, on God's command, raised on a pole in the desert — and Israelites who had been bitten by poisonous snakes had only to look, by faith, at the Man on the cross in order to be saved.

He must have quoted several psalms, especially the twenty-second, which begins with the words spoken from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and goes on to describe one who is suffering terrible agony, who is despised and mocked, whose hands and feet are pierced and for whose tunic lots are cast.

I am sure that he dwelt much on the book of Isaiah and particularly on

the wonderful songs of the Suffering Servant of God, "Whose visage was so marred more than the sons of men", and on whom "the Lord has laid the iniquity of us all." No doubt these and many other passages were discussed and explained while Cleopas and his friend marvelled at what they heard.

The time must have passed very quickly. But now the sun was dipping behind the hills as they were reaching their destination. The stranger appeared to be intending to go farther. "Stay with us", they said, "it will soon be dark." In those days this was an invitation to a meal and a bed for the night.

So the stranger entered the house and took his place at the table. Then he did a curious thing: though he was their guest, he broke the bread

SWISS CHURCHES

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