Have you ever been so disappointed in a relationship that you decided it was better to walk away? Sometimes that is the right course of action for sure—even more so if your health or life is at risk.

But what about when we are tempted to walk away from our faith because things don’t seem to be going the way wanted them? Many people struggle with keeping their faith and are tempted to walk away from it because of disappointments. This happens, for example, when God does not answer our prayers the way we expect or get confused about the value of our beliefs.

Today’s message is about some disciples walking back home after Jesus was crucified, wondering what all that meant. They were confused and losing hope, perhaps even walking away like others.

This is the story per Luke 24: 13-21,

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and Word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

These were difficult times for the disciples—in losing Jesus, their hopes were dashed. Luke tells us that some of them were hiding, gripped with fear of the Jews, while two confused and disheartened disciples left Jerusalem and started traveling back home to Emmaus.

But then, the unexpected happened. As these two were heading back home, a man they did not recognize approached them and said, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” Jesus’s execution was about the only thing people talked about in Jerusalem. So, Cleopas replied to him, saying,

“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” The man replied back, “What things?” “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Then the stranger said the last thing they expected,

“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

After this, this strange man walked Cleopas and his friend through the entire Scriptures for the next two hours and explained all the references to the Christ. And as he did, the fire of their faith that had died came back to life. This experience changed them because they no longer believed with their feelings, but with the hope the Scriptures gave them.

Then, as they approached Emmaus, the disciples pleaded with him to stay for the night and have dinner with them. Once they arrived and were having dinner, the man took some bread, pulled it apart, and gave them each a piece. As soon as the bread touched their hands, they recognized who it was: Jesus. Both gasped, and Jesus vanished.

All this time, the man walking next to them speaking words of encouragement and hope, giving them back their faith by explaining the Scriptures about the Christ, and eating with them by breaking bread with them, was Jesus.

I think there is a lot of us in this story. I can see myself and all of you too in here. Let me explain.

These disciples had a particular expectation of who and what the Messiah ought to be and do for them. They expected their Messiah to fulfill their dreams and expectations of being a king and conqueror, freeing them from their enemies and Roman oppression. But, since that didn’t happen and they did not understand what God was accomplishing, they were disappointed and felt let down.

Has this ever happened to you? You were so convinced that you had all the answers and thought you knew what was better for you, so much that you were sure God was going to do things your way, only to be disappointed and confused?

All of us have been there. Every person deals with old habits, misunderstandings, misguided expectations, and limited ways of thinking that keep us from seeing Jesus and understanding his purposes for our lives. We confuse the things we want with what God has promised us. Instead of coming from a place of faith and openness to the unexpected, we come from settled expectations and limited understanding.

I am telling you this not to discourage you or make you feel bad about yourself but to acknowledge our challenges in believing. We may not understand what God is doing and why some things happen the way they do or why they take too long, but if we keep the faith, we will see everything through.

Here is the good news: I know that although we sometimes feel we are walking alone in this life’s journey, we are not. Jesus is always near us, offering his companionship and blessings. And when we are with him, everything changes because he is our hope and gives us the power to believe and trust that something good will happen to us because of God’s great goodness.

So, here is the invitation: When we are struggling thinking of everything that is wrong with our lives and can’t feel God’s presence, we should pause, read the Bible, pray, and let Jesus speak to our hearts to remind us that he is always there even when we are not feeling it. And then, choose to believe God will do something better and greater than what we expect—so much that we may first be disappointed but then amazingly surprised by the outcome.

Remember, God is leading you to something better than you can imagine. You just need to stay with him along the road to get there. So, please don’t walk away; walk with him.