

Are Our Hearts Burning?

Over the next several weeks between now and Pentecost Sunday, we will be looking at the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus. These appearances are mostly found in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John. My goal in focusing on these passages is to help us understand what Jesus' followers felt and experienced in those first days after the Resurrection and in turn what those encounters have to tell us today.

Today we look at the Resurrection Appearance of Jesus to the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus. Scripture tells us that Emmaus is 7 miles from Jerusalem. It could be that is a round trip figure, but no one is really sure where Emmaus was exactly located. For the text, what is important is that these two followers of Jesus are heading out of Jerusalem, possibly to stay in Emmaus for the remainder of the festival, now that the Passover observance is over.

As they are going, they are having a deep discussion about the events of the prior three days. This is still Easter Sunday and they are trying to figure out what to make of Jesus' death and the women's report that Jesus is no longer in the tomb and that Angels told the women that Jesus was alive.

You will find that I like to ask you to put yourself in the role of someone in the Biblical text. Today I want you to put yourself in the shoes of one of these disciples. Now we know that one of their names is Cleopas, and that he and the other traveler are followers of Jesus but not one of the remaining 11 disciples. That is really all we know about them.

It is clear that they are upset by the loss of Jesus, that they are confused and maybe without hope.

As they are walking, a stranger approaches them and asks what they are discussing. Now we have the advantage of the story and know that this stranger is Jesus. But for some reason, like Mary in the Garden, these men do not realize that it is Jesus speaking with them. Again, we don't know why they don't know, just that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him."

Jesus accompanies them on the walk and the men tell him about himself. They declare Jesus to be "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people...." They report what all had happened in Jerusalem and how that very morning the women had gone and found the tomb empty and delusionally say they spoke to angels and that Jesus is alive.

Jesus chides them, possibly more lovingly than the NRSV translation of "You Fools" in verse 25. Then he

begins to explain scripture to them and how Jesus had to suffer in order to fulfill God's plan.

It is when they get to Emmaus that the men plead with Jesus to stay with them overnight rather than continue his journey and they share a meal together. It is during the meal, during the breaking of the bread that the eyes of these followers were opened and they saw Jesus for who he was. And then Jesus disappeared from them.

These two men then ask themselves, "Were not our hearts burning within when he was explaining the scriptures to us?" And they run back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that they had seen Jesus and are informed that Peter, also, had seen the risen Christ.

Can you imagine how they felt? Can you imagine the thoughts running through their heads? These men who were in the deepest despair, believing that the man they loved was gone- in an instant have those emotions turned on their head.

There are a number of thoughts that occurred to me as I studied this week. Should this sermon focus on loss of hope, hope turned to joy, the excitement of Easter realization? Should this sermon talk about the bombings on Easter in Sri Lanka or the earthquakes in the Philippines? or something else?

As I read today's scripture, the sentence in verse 32 kept coming to my mind, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" I found myself asking if my heart burns when I am reading scripture and studying. And I realized that the answer to that is "not often enough".

When I was in Seminary and even since then I have been frustrated by my default approach of figuring out the pieces and parts of a passage of scripture rather than just allowing the passage to speak to me. I tend to analyze and examine and parse the passages rather than allow them to just speak to me - devotionally. Sometimes it feels more like an assignment to complete rather than a process of spending time with God and seeking a closeness and relationship.

I wondered this week, if you might have similar experiences. How do you read scripture? How do you have time with God? Are you aware of Jesus being there ready to open the scriptures to you? Or does that recognition only come in retrospect as it did with the two men on the road to Emmaus?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. We all experience our relationship with God in different ways. What do we do with today's story? How does it

impact us? Change us? What do we learn about God and ourselves from this story?

Today's text gives us a window, a glimpse of the reality that we need to seek a deeper understanding of Scripture and what Jesus wants us to know and believe and to do.

As we found in last week's passage of the angel's appearing to the women, the response of the disciples' encounter with the Risen Christ in Emmaus, is to immediately run and tell others.

Look around you. Who is missing? I know that there are a few people out of town this weekend, but beyond that. Who used to be here that isn't any longer? Who do you know that COULD be here?

A couple of years ago, Lifeway did a study and asked "unchurched people" some questions. What I find most striking is "Among the unchurched, 55% said they would attend church if invited by a family member. And 51% said they would attend church if invited by a friend or neighbor."

The response to studying scripture and having a relationship with God is that our hearts should be burning. Burning with what? Burning with a desire to share the news of the Resurrected Jesus with the world.

The natural outgrowth of our relationship with God is that we are compelled to share the news of that relationship.

The disciples walking to Emmaus on that Easter Sunday were defeated. They were hopeless. I do not want to suggest that depression and grief are easily remedied because those are processes that take work, but for these two disciples, they had an encounter with the living Jesus that changed their reality. And in response to that changed reality, they HAD to share the news of Jesus.

We are Easter people. Every day we have the opportunity to live like Easter people. We **know** the risen Christ. Our hearts need to be burning with the love of God as Jesus opens scripture to us. We, like these disciples, have an encounter with the living Jesus in worship. That encounter needs to change our reality. And our response must be to share the news of Jesus with the people we meet and with our family and friends.

People will only know if we tell them!