

“Hearts Afire”
Luke 24:13-35
April 16, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to over 500 people after his resurrection. Our passage today tells the story of his appearance to two of these, and it is the lengthiest account in the New Testament of Jesus’ post-resurrection life. His appearance to these two travelers had a dramatic effect upon them. At the beginning of the story, they are sad, foolish and unbelieving. But after their encounter with the resurrected Jesus, their hearts are burning (v. 32). What is a burning heart? It is the heart that has gone from confused to enlightened, from despairing to hopeful, from depressed to energized.

I am reminded of George Bailey, the main character in the classic movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. When he thought that all was lost and his bank was going to fail, he wanted to end his life. But after a visit from the angel Clarence, who showed him what his town would be like had he never lived, his perspective is completely transformed and his heart is burning within him. I think of the biblical character, Jacob, who at one point in his life said that everything is against him. He had thought that he had lost his favorite son, Joseph, and then his next favorite son, Benjamin. But as the story develops, we learn that the very things he thought were against him were actually for him. His son that he thought was dead ended up being the Prime Minister of Egypt, able to provide food for Jacob and all his growing family during a severe drought. His circumstances didn’t change, but his perspective did, resulting in another burning heart.

That’s the effect of the risen Jesus upon us. Don’t we all desire such a heart afire? An encounter with the living Lord will give it to us. Let’s trace the development of this burning heart in the lives of these two travelers.

I. A Sad Heart

Their journey to a burning heart started with a sad heart. Luke tells us that the events described here happened on **“that very day,”** by which he means the day of Jesus’ resurrection, the first day of the week. Two of Jesus’ disciples, not any of the 12 apostles but those who had followed him to the end, were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It is likely that they were going home. They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah who would redeem Israel and deliver them from all their enemies, the latest of which were the Romans. They had held on to this hope to the bitter end, thinking that the power they had seen when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead would be unveiled again. But it

never happened. Jesus had truly died on that cross, a shameful and agonizing death. Now it was time to accept reality and move on, as hard as it was to do so. So these two were taking steps back into a life after Jesus.

As they were on their way to Emmaus, a fellow traveler began to walk with them. He noticed that they were doing more than just walking, being engaged in what was apparently a deep conversation. So he asked them about it. **“What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?”** The reader is told that this fellow traveler is none other than the risen Jesus, but the other two were kept from recognizing him. They think he is nothing more than another man walking the same road as them. This tells us something about the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body, and the nature of our future resurrected bodies as well. It was entirely normal in appearance. He didn’t have a heavenly glow about him, but was a material being who was indistinguishable from any other human being. As we learn elsewhere in the Bible, his resurrected body also had some significant differences from his pre-resurrection body, but appearance was not one of them.

As they prepared to answer Jesus’ question about the content of their conversation, Luke tells us that the two were so sad that it was evident in their appearance. It is possible to be sad and to hide it from others, but there is a sadness that can’t be hidden. Such was the case with these two. But do you see the irony of their situation? At the very time of their great sadness, they were in the presence of the one who can and would soon make all things new for them.

I have noticed that it is often the case that God breaks through in our lives at moments of great sadness. When things seem to be at a low point, God is most present to bring the kind of shift that will lead to hearts afire with passion. The key is to do what these two did at the invitation of Jesus: they honestly took their sadness to him.

II. A Foolish, Unbelieving Heart

We are given one of the names of these travelers, and it is Cleopas who answers Jesus’ question about the things that had happened in Jerusalem about which they were so engrossed in conversation. After his answer, Jesus says, **“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”** (v. 25). Cleopas and his companion were being both foolish and unbelieving. As we read Cleopas’ summary of events that he spoke to Jesus, we can see their unbelief. He reports how it is now the third day since Jesus died. Hadn’t Jesus said repeatedly that he would die and be raised again on the third day? They weren’t believing this. Further, they had the testimony of the women who had already been to the tomb and reported that they found it empty. Further, they had seen angels there who said that Jesus had been

raised. What did Cleopas think of such a report? We are told back in verse 11: **“but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”** They dismissed it as just the words of hysterical, unreliable women. Further, they had the testimony of the Old Testament, a testimony they weren’t believing.

Jesus also calls them foolish. Their foolishness is seen in their misinterpretation of the events of the day we call “Good Friday.” It was the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, and they interpret that day as the end of their hopes when in fact it was the day that would ultimately fuel their hopes. In short, their foolishness was seen in embracing the day of crucifixion as real but not realizing that there was also a day of resurrection. Their’s was a Good Friday without an Easter Sunday.

The good news of this is that Jesus is walking with them. Aren’t you glad that Jesus walks with foolish and unbelieving people? I certainly am, because I often forget the staggering reality of Easter Sunday. I am often foolish in this way.

III. Scripture-Taught Hearts

How does Jesus go about addressing their needs? The risen Jesus, the Lord who knows all things, the Mighty God and Wonderful Counselor, has a Bible study. It is Bible study that leads them to have burning hearts. Remember that they didn’t know at this point that it was the risen Jesus who was with them. We are not going to have the risen Christ with us in this life either. But that’s okay, because he has given us his word and his Spirit to help us understand and believe his word.

What did Jesus teach them that led to their burning hearts? He taught them that it was **“necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory”** (v. 26). And he taught this from the Old Testament, which Jesus saw as being all about himself. We don’t have to wonder about this Bible lesson from Jesus because the entire New Testament reflects this approach to the Old Testament. So we read that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover. When the angel of death was moving through Egypt on that Passover night, slaying the first born of every family, there was only one force in the universe strong enough to stop it. A lamb slain would cause the angel of death to pass over any house with the blood on the doorpost. Jesus is the Passover lamb. Good Friday was Passover, and just as the lamb had to be slain, so Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, had to be slain on this day. Perhaps he also brought up Psalm 16:10. **“You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”**

I think the key to this whole passage is the word “necessary.” It was necessary that the Christ should suffer and be glorified in his resurrection. That word speaks of divine necessity. It was necessary because it was in the plan of God to bring his salvation. Good Friday wasn’t the tragedy they were assuming it was. It wasn’t the end of God’s plan to save the world, but the necessary payment of sins in God’s process of making all things new and removing the curse on this world due to the sin of the human race.

By the end of this story, they report that their hearts are on fire. As a result, notice what they do. **“And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together”** (v. 33). It is getting late and they have just walked the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. But now, with hearts full of joy, they return that very hour to Jerusalem to tell that they have seen Jesus and have been taught by him. What has changed? Their circumstances are exactly the same. Jesus was still crucified on Good Friday. What has changed is their perspective. They see now God’s pattern of Good Friday, followed by Easter. And for the first time, they understand that there is an Easter.

Let’s pause for an application. The Bible teaches that this pattern of Good Friday followed by Easter is a pattern repeated in the lives of all Jesus’ followers. What did Jesus teach his disciples about following him? **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it”** (Luke 9:23-24). This is the pattern of death and resurrection, and Jesus says that it is not just something in the future, but something that characterizes the lives of Jesus’ followers every day.

The transformation that happened in the lives of these two travelers to Emmaus is to be repeated in our lives every day. How do you respond when things aren’t going the way you want them to go? Our instinctive and sinful response is to complain, to despair or to wait it out and hope for a better day in the future. In short, our solution is for a change of circumstances. Jesus looks at us and says the same thing he said to these two people: **“O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe.”** A believing response is to remember the order of Good Friday first and then Easter, death and then resurrection. When things don’t go the way we want them to go, it is God’s call to us to take up a cross and die. But death is not the end but the necessary prelude to real life.

In most cases, we don’t get to change the circumstances of our lives. Many of you know that Wendy’s mother had a stroke this week. Wendy spent much of the week with her mother in the hospital and I picked up the slack at home. It wasn’t the week any of us would have planned for ourselves, but it was the week we had. It makes all the difference when we see such things as God’s call to us to follow the pattern of Good Friday and then Easter, of death and then resurrection.

IV. Christ-Seeing Hearts

As they drew near to Emmaus, Jesus acted as if he were going to keep going. But Cleopas and his companion invited Jesus to stay with them for the night. He does so, and somehow the roles get swapped and Jesus becomes the host at this meal. As host, he takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them. It was precisely at that moment that their eyes were opened, they recognized him as Jesus, and Jesus disappeared.

What do these events mean for us? Let me point out just a couple of things. First, it means that Jesus waits to be invited in. Have you invited Jesus into the hard things of your life? He wants to bring his life, his resurrection life into the challenging realities of your life. All you need to do is to invite him in. You will not need to tell him what to do when he comes in, because he already knows. He will come in and take charge. Easter follows Good Friday every time for the follower of Christ who invites Jesus in.

Second, he comes in as host, not as guest. I don't know how the roles got swapped in this incident, but I do know that Jesus is the one who prepares a table for us. Jesus is portrayed so many times in Luke's gospel eating with different people. He is criticized for eating with the wrong people, with sinners. He miraculously feeds thousands from only a small provision. He pictures heaven as feasting with him. Eating together is a picture in the Bible of reconciled relationships. Adam and Eve got us all into trouble by eating the forbidden fruit, resulting in being banished from eating from the tree of life and separated from God. Now Jesus restores what was lost, eating with his people and returning life to us. The cross has become the new tree of life, from which we can eat and never die again.

CONCLUSION:

There is one more point of importance I don't want us to miss in this passage. When these two return to Jerusalem to tell the apostles that they have seen Jesus, they find that Jesus has been busy there as well. Apparently, Jesus in his resurrected state is not bound by space the same way he was prior to his resurrection. We learn that he has appeared to Peter. What an encouraging thing it is to read that. Peter, the one who had denied the Lord, receives a special visit from the Lord. No matter what you've done or how you might have offended Jesus in the past through your sin, he is ready to come to you as well and extend his promise of eternal life to you. All you must do is humble yourself and receive it, and your heart too will burn within you with a new joy and passion.