

April 26, 2009

Scripture: Luke 24: 13-49

Sermon: "Holy Heartburn "

Have you ever had one of those days? You know what I'm talking about. One of THOSE days. When you've had a rough time and you really don't want to interact with anyone who could possibly wound you any further! You just want to walk and think, that's it. I imagine that must've been how Cleopas and the other disciple thought on their way to Emmaus. They had just had a week of mountain top highs and rock bottom lows. They just wanted to walk, and be near to one another, to share in their grief and disappointment. And to try and figure this whole Jesus thing out. They were in their own little world, and that was just fine for Cleopas and the disciple.

You can almost hear the skip in the stranger's voice as he says "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" The tone must've sounded like nails on a chalkboard to the disciples. What do you mean what have we been discussing? You can hear the utter disbelief in Cleopas' voice as he says "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" The stranger still does not understand what has been happening so Cleopas continues to make his case. You can almost feel the intensity in Cleopas' voice, see him leaning closer and closer to the stranger, failing his arms in order to make his point to this incompetent man.

I think we've all felt like Cleopas. When something tragic has happened that has left our world view in shambles, we expect everyone to know exactly what happened and exactly how we feel. How could they possibly not know about us and our issues!?! Why don't they know how our life has been changed? How can they not know our pain? We've all felt like Cleopas at varying degrees. Whether its difficulty at work or school or the death of a loved one, we've all experienced that grief, that disappointment, that earth shattering feeling that our world will never be the same.

And we've all had those people who innocently stumble upon our paths and travel with us for awhile. Sometimes we ignore them, sometimes we run from them, often we interact with those who stumble upon our paths in less than desirable ways. Even, less than Christian ways. I remember one of these instances in my own life. When my friend was in the hospital with some chest pain, a sweet man in his eighties came around. He was wearing a blue jacket with an emblem on it that read "Chaplain". I ran as fast as I could away from that man. I didn't want anything to do with him. I know ... a minister running away from another minister, it happens more often than one would think. I treated this man in a less than Christian manner. When he would finally catch me to ask if I wanted some coffee or a bagel I'd just shoo him away, claiming that I was fine.

As Cleopas, the disciple, and the stranger, all continued down the road to Emmaus, the stranger opened the scriptures to them. The stranger, made sense out of their chaos. He helped them put the pieces of their lives back together. Can you imagine, having someone who a few hours ago didn't even know your situation be able to put all the pieces of your broken world back together?

I have always loved putting together jigsaw puzzles. There's just something about finding out how each and every piece fits in. One day, my friend and I were putting together a puzzle and she decided that she was going to hide the box and see what would happen. Suddenly, I didn't like jigsaw puzzles anymore. I couldn't see where I was heading, what the end product was, and I didn't want to play anymore!

I imagine that's how Cleopas and the disciple felt. They had been spending all this time following someone who they thought was a prophet and who they thought was going to reclaim Israel for the Jews, and he had been crucified. It was like someone had taken the picture of the jigsaw puzzle and hidden it so they could not see what it was they were supposed to be living into. But once this stranger, this wonderful, mystical man they met on the road began opening the scriptures to them, all of a sudden, it was clear.

Scripture tells us that their hearts were burning within them as they were walking down the road and Jesus was opening the scriptures to them. Hearts on fire! Holy heartburn! I wonder what Cleopas and the disciple thought this burning was. I wonder if they thought they had eaten some bad fish. I wonder if they recognized that feeling meant that something miraculous was happening all around them. When we hear fire mentioned in the Bible we know that whatever is happening is a God thing.

Have you ever felt that Holy Heartburn? Have you ever felt like you were on fire with the Gospel? That you were exactly where, and when, and who and what God had created you to be at that very moment? I hope you have. I remember the first time I felt the holy heartburn. I wasn't much older than Preston or Luke. At the time I thought perhaps I had just eaten something weird or perhaps that sugary breakfast cereal wasn't the best idea. It was during a sunrise Easter service. The music was playing, the choir was singing, and an empty tomb stood before the congregation. And I felt this almost electric surge run through my body. You know that feeling you get when everything tingles. I'll never forget that day. At the time I just thought it was really cool. Looking back now ... it's still really cool.

Perhaps that feeling is the feeling that Cleopas and the disciple were feeling when they invited Jesus to stay with them. Perhaps they were so filled with the holy spirit in the presence of this man who had opened up the scriptures to them that they didn't want to leave. As Jesus joined them for supper, he became known to them in the breaking of bread. And this, my friends is the climax of our story. As disciples, we cherish this part of the story. Of course Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread. We celebrate communion every Sunday to remind us of the promises that Jesus made to us all those many years ago. The Emmaus story is perhaps the second most known story to disciples, second only to the last supper.

But perhaps this scripture has another lesson for us today. Perhaps we can take another look at God's word and find a new word.

What interests me most about the Emmaus story isn't how Jesus became known to them in the breaking of bread. What interests me most is the journey of Cleopas and the disciple. I'm talking about the journey in faith that these people share. Cleopas and the disciple go from sadness and

disappointment, to anger, to vulnerability and finally end up with hospitality. That's quite the journey.

We've all either had or will have our Emmaus experiences. Perhaps we didn't encounter the risen Christ but we have had or will have that heartburn. That holy heartburn. The question is ... what will we do when we feel such a burninh. Will we ignore it or will we take the lead of the disciples, and practice hospitality? My challenge for you and for myself this week is in these times of uncertainty, of fear and of disappointment. As the world around you seems to be going through an experience where you know it will never be the same. Take your cue for Cleopas and the disciple. Allow yourself to be in your sadness, to walk through despair. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. Vulnerable to the work of the spirit in your lives. To feel and to live with this burning. And turn that burning within you to a practice of hospitality, and maybe, just maybe, the risen Christ will be revealed to you once again.

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