**Easter Sunday**

**Sunday April 17, 2022**

**“Heart Burn on the Road to Emmaus” (Luke 23:13-35)**

When I was a teenager and a brand-new Christian, an important part of my spiritual journey was being involved in the Christian fellowship group at my high school. The staff person who supervised and supported this group was Mr. Henry, the school librarian, and an active member of the local Baptist church. One evening the group held an event at our high school and while we were talking, someone asked Mr. Henry why he believed in Jesus. Without missing a beat, Mr. Henry responded with a smile and said, “*Heart burn*.” Everyone in the group looked at him with puzzled expressions, wondering what he meant by *heart burn.* In response, Mr. Henry quoted from Luke’s Gospel, “*Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*” (Luke 24:32). Then Mr. Henry opened the Scriptures to us and told us the story of the Emmaus Road disciples and their encounter with Jesus. It became very clear that when Mr. Henry was talking about *heart burn,* he was talking about the real and living presence of Jesus in his life.

But the two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not start off with *heart burn*. In fact, it was quite the opposite, it was *heart break*. Luke chapter 24 tells the story of these two disciples who were making their way back to their home village of Emmaus from Jerusalem. The eleven-kilometer journey would have taken about 6 to 8 hours to complete, so they had lots of time to talk and reflect about the tragic events of those past few days. They had just lost their best friend to a horrific set of events. Jesus, their beloved teacher, and friend had died. As they walked that weary path home, they poured over the details of that awful Friday and wondered how such a terrible thing could have happened to such a good person.

While they were sharing their sad tales, an unexpected traveller joined them on the road. The risen Christ walked alongside them “*but their eyes were kept from recognizing him*” (24:16). A frequent feature within the various Gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection is the disciples’ lack of recognition of the risen Christ (Matthew 28:17; John 20:14; 21:4). In this case the passage explains that the two disciples were prevented from recognizing Jesus. Yet, their eyes were miraculously opened at the climax of the passage (24:31). Clearly, God had a plan for the meaningful unveiling of Jesus’ identity to these disciples at just the right time.

As they walked along the road, the risen Jesus asked the two disciples, “*What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?*” (24:17). Now, I find this question interesting. Jesus had obviously overheard their conversation and knew exactly what they had been talking about. In fact, he was the person they were talking about, yet he still asked them about their conversation. Their immediate response exposed their deep despair. “*They stopped short, sadness written across their faces*” (24:17). Their emotions - sadness, despair, disappointment, and confusion - were quite evident by their reaction. But they were also quite surprised by their fellow traveller’s ignorance about these current events. Cleopas, one of the disciples, questioned him, “*Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days*?” (24:18). Yet, Jesus pressed on with his questions, “*What things have happened*?” (24:19).

I imagine that Cleopas responded with great emotion, his voice quivering, maybe he even shed some tears. He told his fellow traveller the sad story of their friend Jesus, a prophet, mighty in word and deed, blessed by God and the people, who had been arrested by their religious leaders, sentenced to die and crucified (24:19-20). Their deep sadness welled up because they couldn’t understand how God’s prophet could have been badly treated. They’d had high hopes for Jesus and greatly anticipated the wonderful things he was going to do. They perceived Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah who would liberate Israel. But now their hopes and dreams were shattered by his death. Nothing good could come now because Jesus was dead (24:21). Yet their sad tale had a perplexing postscript. Just as the two disciples were getting ready for the trip home, reports were circulating that Jesus’ tomb was empty and his body was missing. The women disciples who visited the tomb spoke of angelic appearances and heavenly declarations that Jesus had come back to life (24:22-24). But the other disciples had trouble believing the women’s story because it seemed like nonsense to them (24:11).

As I reflect on this part of the passage, I think that it was very meaningful that Jesus invited these disciples to share their story with him. All that heavy stuff needed to get out - the pain and disappointment, the shattered hopes and dreams, and the perplexing news that Jesus had risen from the grave. The incognito Jesus asked about and listened to their story with the same attentiveness that he listens to our painful stories. He invites us to be completely honest with him about what is going on in our lives. In same way, we must follow Christ’s example and listen to each another. May the risen Christ give us courage, authenticity, and transparency so that we might be free to share our struggles with life and faith. May God’s Spirit help us to create a community of care and honesty, so that we might genuinely discuss challenging issues. May God open our eyes to see the people around us who feel isolated, thinking that no one truly understands them. May God give us the grace to be fellow travellers with each other.

Jesus listened to their story, but he didn’t leave them wallowing in their grief and confusion. He got right to the heart of the disciples’ despair – their lack of insight into the mission of the Messiah. So, he rebuked them for their lack of understanding, using some rather strong words, “*So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said?*” (24:25). But Jesus moved beyond a simple reprimand and resolved the disciples’ lack of understanding. At the very heart of this story, in verses 26 and 27, Jesus declared, “*Was it not necessary that the Messiahshould suffer these things and then enter into his glory?*” Then he walked them through the Scriptures - the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings - and showed them all the Scriptures that referred to the Messiah’s mission. Jesus addressed their shock, the horror and disappointment by opening the Word to them. In this way, he explained that that it was *necessary* for the Messiah to suffer and die.

Jesus’ scriptural update serves as a fitting conclusion to Luke’s Gospel. On several occasions the disciples failed to understand Jesus’ words. The most famous examples are his passion predictions (9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31-22; 22:37). In these passages Jesus predicted that he would suffer and die at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities yet rise on the third day. Even though, Jesus had foretold these events, the disciples did not fully comprehend them (9:45; 18:34). So, at this crucial juncture in the Gospel story, Jesus opened up their minds to understand the Scriptures that spoke of his death and resurrection.

Later in this story, after the two disciples had recognized Jesus, they recalled the significance of this key moment, “Were not our *hearts* *burning* within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (24:32). That’s the kind of *heart burn* that we all long for! We long for Jesus to open the Scriptures to us and reveal his truth to us. Jesus wants to give us insight, guidance, encouragement, and help. He wishes to move us from heart break to heart burn.

But it begins with us. We need to let the risen Jesus open the Scriptures to us. It requires us to move from simply reading Scripture to attentively listening for God’s voice. Making this distinction, Eugene Peterson writes, “Reading Scripture is not the same as listening to God. To do one is not necessarily to do the other. But they are often assumed to be the same thing. This happens so commonly and so insidiously that we have to be analytically alert to the ways in which listening to the word of God slides off into reading about the word of God, and then energetically recover a listening ear. The Christian’s interest in Scripture has always been in hearing God speak, not in analyzing moral memos” (*Working the Angles,* p. 61).

Jesus’ intense Bible study with the Emmaus Road disciples ended as neared their home village. When it appeared that their fellow traveller was moving on, they kindly offered him a place to stay because the sun was setting (24:28-29). “*Stay for supper and stay for the night*,” they urged him. Then in a scene that deeply moves me, the mysterious guest sat at the table with them. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them (24:30). In that incredible moment, their eyes were opened, and they immediately recognized their Lord (24:31). Later, after they had made their way back to Jerusalem, they told the others about “what had happened on the road, and *how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread*” (24:35).

This reference to the breaking of the bread clearly points us to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Communion, the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist is filled with mystery and meaning. Throughout the ages Christians have endeavored to understand it and to explain its significance. Christians around the world celebrate this meal in various ways and many churches have different theological beliefs about it. Perhaps something we can all agree on is that Christ is make known to us in the breaking of the bread. This morning, when we hold the bread and the wine our hands, may we recognize the wonder of this gift and receive it as Christ’s life for us. This morning as we come to the Table, let us come as we are and meet our Lord in the breaking of the bread. Come and eat for only Jesus can feed that deep hunger that resides in your soul.

After Jesus had broken the bread, he vanished from their sight, but not from their memories. They immediately said to each other, “*Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us*?” (24:32). The Emmaus Road disciples had *heart burn,* do we?