

# “The Need for Burning Hearts”

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

April 6, 2008

Texts: Acts 2:14a, 36-47 / 1 Peter 1:17-23 / Luke 24:13-35

### Luke 24:13-35

**13** That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, **14** and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. **16** But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. **17** And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” **19** And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. **22** Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, **23** and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” **25** And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

**28** So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, **29** but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. **30** When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. **31** And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. **32** They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” **33** And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, **34** saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture. It is a passage filled with despair, but then hope. It is a passage filled with sadness, but then joy! The disciples are on the road to Emmaus. They are despondent over the loss of their leader. Jesus seemed to be God and to have God's own power, but had He not been killed right before their eyes? To make matters even worse, He had been hung on a cross to die; and the Holy Scriptures were clear on that one: He that hangs on a tree is cursed! So, the one whom they had faith in, the one considered most holy has now fallen to the level of being cursed.

But, notice first, and most importantly that, if we have no hope, then we cannot see Jesus. If we are standing still, looking sad, as verse 17 says, then we will never see Jesus. If we are despondent, despairing, or disgruntled then Jesus Christ will not be revealed to us in Scripture, and through our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we have hard and closed hearts, we cannot see the beauty of the risen Christ!

Just this past Thursday I had the joy of teaching about First Communion to ten children of the parish...bright, thoughtful children all! And one of the things I told them was that when they received the wine and the bread on April 20<sup>th</sup>, when they received the Body and Blood of Christ, they would then all be brothers and sisters. I told them to look across the table at one another...to look closely at their new brothers and sisters. Some got rather quizzical looks on their faces...Sarah Yandle said that she already had a brother but that she would love to have some new sisters; and Henry Crowther said that all he really wanted was a monkey!

Now, unless all of you just want a monkey, I would like all of you to look around at those sitting in the pews. These are your brothers and sisters. We don't mean this in a figurative sense, we mean this in the truest sense. Jesus Christ said it was so. We who come to His table and partake of His Body and Blood during Holy Communion are indeed brothers and sisters.

But, we are unable to realize this, unable to sense this, if we are wrangling with others, if we are despondent over something in our life, or if our hearts are simply hardened against believing in Jesus Christ and trusting His Holy Word.

Several things happen to us, when we cease to believe in the Resurrection and the power of God to make new life. The first is that we start to re-adjust what we know to be true. The disciples on the road to Emmaus knew what Mary had told them about seeing Jesus in the flesh and speaking to Him. And yet, just a few hours later they are fleeing from Jerusalem, afraid, and saying that Mary had seen “visions.”

What Mary had seen is given in both Mark and John’s Gospel. From John’s Gospel,

**11** But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. **13** They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” **14** Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” **16** Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher) [in other words she recognized Him]... **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

You see. This was not a vision. Mary was clear. She told the disciples “I have seen the Lord” and that He had spoken to her. Yet, fear and their rational minds had clouded the testimony for the disciples just a few hours later, for they say that the women came back saying only that they had “seen a vision of angels”, when, in point of fact it was not a vision, but actual angels they had seen, as well as Jesus Christ Himself. Again, verse 16 says, “But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.” Their own disbelief clouded even their ability to see the Lord right in front of them.

Then, the Gospel says in verse 27, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Boy, I wish we had a CD of this conversation. How amazing that would

have been!...To have Jesus Himself open the Scriptures of the Old Testament in such a powerful way to reveal Himself. Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryle says that we know the sorts of things that He must have said to those two disciples. That

Christ was the substance of every OT sacrifice, ordained in the law of Moses. Christ was the true Deliverer and King, of whom all the judges and deliverers in Jewish history were types. Christ was the coming Prophet greater than Moses, whose glorious advent filled the pages of prophets. Christ was the true seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head, -- the true seed in whom all nations were to be blessed, -- the true Shiloh to whom the people were to be gathered, -- the true scape-goat, -- the true brazen serpent, -- the true Lamb to which every daily offering pointed, -- the true High Priest of whom every descendant of Aaron was a figure (*Luke, Vol. 2, p. 501*).

But, still, they did not recognize Jesus. The words were true and powerful. They knew that, because later (in verse 32) they would say, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?"

So, this is a lesson for all of us. First, that words are not enough. Learning the Bible backwards and forwards is not enough. We can only truly recognize Jesus in action. It was not until Jesus did something that was familiar, something that was in character for Him, something that was so representative of Himself, that they finally recognized Him. Second, that Jesus is always with us, even when we don't recognize Him or feel His presence. He is always standing at the door and knocking, always patiently waiting for us to reply to Him.

To their credit, the disciples knew enough to invite Jesus to stay with them. They were not completely lost or irreversibly despondent. They still knew that this stranger had great power through the way He opened up the Scriptures, through the caring way He spoke with them, and so they invited Him to stay with them and to share supper with them.

That is my prayer for each and every one of us who is undergoing a great trial; a great trial in their family that may be testing their faith. You may have lost a loved

one, or you may have a loved-one who is ill, or there may be things happening in your life that seem so out of control. Just continue to ask Jesus to stay with you. Continue to come to His table for solace and strength. Continue to fellowship with Christ's disciples here at St. John's.

Luke's Gospel says (verses 30 and 31), "**30** When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. **31** And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him... It was only in the breaking of the Bread, in the drinking of the wine, that they recognized Him fully. So it is with us. Only when we are broken for our brothers and sisters, in action, that we recognize Jesus. Only in deeds of comfort and caring, are people brought to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

The disciples first recognized Jesus, I am convinced, by observing Him in an act, by a certain expression, by a certain tilt of the head, or even by the sound of His voice, as we saw with Mary in the garden. I am often asked how we will know one another in the afterlife, during the time of the New Heavens and New Earth. We know that we will get new bodies for this glorious existence, so how will we know each other. I am convinced, and Christ is the example, that we will know each other by certain expressions, hand gestures, or the sound of our voices.

Beth and I have a photograph taken during the recessional at the end of our wedding. I am grinning ear to ear and Beth has this giddy, joyous, sweet expression. Her eyes are squinted and she has a broad Cheshire-cat grin. It is an expression I've seen a thousand times since that day, and I am convinced it is one of many ways I will recognize her after we both have died, received our new bodies, and are living in eternity with God, in glory.

Finally, this passage from Luke teaches us that, once we have heard God's Word, heard it preached faithfully, and received the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, we need to respond. And the response is to turn. The Gospel is always a challenge to action and to change. Recall what the Gospel says of the two disciples,

**33** And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, **34** saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

So, we are to turn from the way of fear, judgement, and our own selfish desires, and return, as the disciples did, to Jerusalem...to the source of our faith. Return to the Body of Christ, the people of God. Repent of our selfishness and return to fellowship with Christ through the people of God. And then, spread the Gospel of Christ to all your friends. The Gospel which proclaims that Christ is known in the breaking of the bread -- in the Holy Eucharist -- in the fellowship of the saints, in the weekly worship of God’s people.

Brothers and sisters, we need hearts that burn when we hear God’s Word. We need hearts that thrill at the sound of the voice of our Savior as found in Scripture. We need hearts that, every time we open the pages of Holy Scripture, beat more rapidly in expectation of what new revelation, what new challenge we might find there. We need hearts that come to Christ’s Holy Table pregnant with anticipation about being made new through the Body and Blood of Christ. We need hearts that come to worship each Sunday expectant about what God might do in the worship, in the reading of God’s Word, in the singing of the hymns, in the prayers, and at His Holy Table. We need hearts that burn for one another in love and caring and sacrifice. Then, those who come to St. John’s for the first time, those who return after a long absence, and those who have recognized Christ in our midst will say in the parking lot or returning home, “Did not our hearts burn within us.” That is my prayer. That is my great hope for this parish.

*Amen.*