



Pass it On: Burning Hearts



<Read scripture Luke 24:13-35>

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over 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 took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed 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 they did not see him."

²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.



How do you witness to your faith? How do you *Pass it On*? How do you pass on Resurrection Life? Last week we talked about witnessing to our faith as we heard the Easter story in the 12 verses that immediately preceded the scripture that was read to us today. In that story, three women went to the tomb early in the morning to anoint Jesus' body. They found the stone rolled away, encountered two angels, and then went and told their story to the disciples. The women believed. The women remembered Jesus' words and message to them. The women rushed to tell and speak their truth.

We thought about how we too have a story to tell of how we have experienced the Risen Christ. A story perhaps of an encounter with God whose ways are not our ways. A story of embracing new life and not clinging to safety. A story of a time we have responded to Jesus' prophetic challenges.



But God also works in our lives in mysterious, mystical ways and we can witness to that too. We can get stuck on the academic head-knowledge. Or maybe it's just me with that problem? We want to know exactly what a specific passage in scripture means and what God is saying to us through that passage. And that is not a bad thing. But sometimes we just need to stop and listen and feel. God does not just speak to our minds, but in some strange bodily experiential ways too.

God is there ...

When we feel the peace that passes all understanding.

When we experience unexpected healing.

When we are embraced by love as we walk through difficult times in our lives.

When we feel an unexpected nudge to stop and help another.

When we get goose bumps from hearing a friend's story.

When we have a dream that gives us a new direction or purpose.

When our hearts are strangely warmed with a new way of understanding.

When we look back and suddenly realize that the risen Christ was present.

And we witness to our faith when we name and claim those experiences and tell others about them.



In our scripture reading Cleopas and the unnamed disciple were traveling home to Emmaus filled with sadness.¹ Their hopes were dashed... the dream was over! These two were already on their way home. What else was there left to do? Life goes on... Life must go on... The reports that Christ's tomb was empty had only confused the disciples more. The two downhearted disciples on the road to Emmaus summed up the situation when they said, "we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." We had hoped ...



Road to Emmaus is maybe 7 miles NW of Jerusalem, which would be about 2 to 3 hours walking. Imagine walking it. A stranger walks with you, maybe you caught him up or vice versa, but you continue on together and get into conversation. Perhaps today it would be like sitting next to someone on a plane, or waiting in a doctor's surgery. Your path crosses with a stranger for a short period of time and you know you are unlikely to meet again. You get into a conversation. And it turns out to be a stimulating, challenging conversation.

Then the time comes to part company with the stranger on the road, but it is late and it feels like the right thing to do is to invite the stranger in for a meal. Perhaps today you get off the plane but the stranger you were sat next to discovers their ride is delayed in heavy traffic, so you go to the airport coffee shop and grab a coffee and wait together. Or that person you met in the doctors waiting room comes out the door at the same time as you and your stomachs rumble in unison, and you end up stopping together at the local café.



And as you share a meal together, break bread together, suddenly it feels like a sacred meal, like communion, and you experience that ah-ha moment. And then the moment has passed. It was fleeting and elusive at the edge of your awareness. But you are sure you experienced the risen Christ.



And when the stranger is gone and you think back about the conversation you had earlier. You remember how engaged you were and you realize that your heart was burning at the time, or you remember the goose bumps that prickled you, or that peace you felt, or that compassion for someone whose situation you'd have previously condemned. Perhaps you got a new insight into a scripture that popped into your mind or a scripture that the stranger shared with you.

And even though it is now late at night and it'll take two hours to walk back from Emmaus to Jerusalem, you hurry back there because this is just too exciting to keep to yourself. Today? Well maybe you'd phone a friend even though she might be in bed,

¹ The next five pictures are © LumoProject.com - used for educational purposes through freebibleimages.org



'you'll never believe what I just experienced'. Or you'd put something on Facebook or tweet it or write a blog entry. The good news is that Christ does come to us in ways that we can experience. And we often recognize this when we break bread together as we will do later in today's service.

One of the most tantalizing elements of the story is that as soon as the two disciples recognized the living Lord he disappeared from their sight. God's presence is often elusive, fleeting, dancing mysteriously at the edge of our awareness and perception. As the nuns in the *Sound of Music* sing: "How do you catch a moonbeam in your hand? How do you hold a wave upon the sand?" We perceive God's presence in mysterious ways. And sometimes we only realize it after the event. God comes near and by the time we look up, we see God's back. It was in retrospect that the two disciples realized that their hearts were burning. But when they did make the connection, they set off to joyfully share their discovery.²

What set the disciples hearts on fire? I'd like to quickly point out 2 things:



One. Jesus was made known through the recalling of scripture and the breaking of bread, through word and sacrament. As they shared the meal together and the stranger blessed and broke the bread, the disciples remembered all the other times Jesus had blessed and broken bread with them, at the feeding of the 5000, at the Passover meal. When they saw the familiar they recognized him. That's how it still works for us today. **We experience Christ as we read, sing, pray and eat together. Something happens when we come together. In the midst of worship, we meet Christ.**



John Wesley talked about reading scripture, studying together, worship and holy communion as channels of grace, or places where you reliably and consistently find God turning up. Wesley himself in his 30's was feeling particularly discouraged. Seeing the strong faith of some Moravians, he thought perhaps he was not a true Christian as in his faith walk, he did not have their *lack of fear* and their joy. But one day, on May 24, 1738, Wesley was at a meeting on Aldersgate Street studying the preface to Romans when he found his "**heart strangely warmed**" and believed himself saved. He later concluded that he was already a Christian, but this was a pivotal moment, and he realized that he didn't have to prove himself worthy. He then proceeded to preach that message with enthusiasm everywhere he went.

² *New Interpreter's Bible*: Vol. VIII. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 482.



What set the disciples hearts on fire? Two. What was it that Jesus had taught them while he was alive? He taught them to love others. Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew tells us that Jesus said

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when ... [did we do these things]?"

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25:35-40).

Cleopas and the other disciple show hospitality and invite the stranger to dinner and end up seeing the risen Christ. We meet Jesus in the process of helping others. If you want to see Jesus, then go and help someone out. If you want your heart to burn, then cook a meal at Hospitality House, or hand out food on Thursday mornings in N. Auburn, or take a shift at the Interfaith Food Ministry. By blessing others in the name of Jesus Christ we experience the presence of the risen Lord.



I saw this photograph a few days ago. The caption had my heart burning: "Yesterday this pile of blankets was all over the ground filthy, partially wet and frozen having been slept in the night before. I saw a city worker putting the stuff into what looked like a trash bag. Then this morning I walk by the same spot and see the blankets had been washed and folded..."³



I joined 20 or so other clergy this week on the steps of the Capitol as we rallied and gave voice to the love God has for gay and lesbian people. And as a witness to an alternate Christian voice to the one being espoused to a crowd of thousands on the steps on the other side of the Capitol. Franklin Graham was there encouraging folk to get out and vote to get engaged politically, and to stand for Biblical values. Only the Biblical values in respect to homosexuality that he was espousing and naming are not the same values that we here believe to be true. This congregation is a *welcoming, reconciling congregation with open hearts, open minds and open doors to ALL*. We do not believe that same-sex marriage is detestable or that Satan is behind LGBTQ rights and advocacy or that the Boy Scouts allowing gay members is supporting "corrupt values." And so I attended the *No Hate in our*

³ March 25 on <https://www.facebook.com/EverythingNow1/>.

state rally. And we went on the sidewalk outside the capitol as a SILENT loving witness to the Decision America attendees that hatred will not prevail.

This was a stretch for me. I've been at rallies for other things when everyone at the rally supported the same thing. This was scary to do. We were not treated respectfully by the Christians who had come out to listen to Franklin Graham. There were folk trying to deliberately interrupt our rally. There was an incident where one of the clergy was verbally challenged and spat at. Once we moved around to listen to the FG rally, there was more respect but we had a constant procession of people coming up and telling us that we were sinful, that God loved us but we had to repent of our ways. And there were some who thanked us for being there.



And I experienced fear. Coming just days after Holy Week, it was a reminder of the jeering crowds that surrounded Jesus. But I saw Christ too and my heart was burning. One of our speakers, sorry I don't know his name, was from an LGBT resource center in Sacramento, and he told of the 40 teenagers they had through their doors since Monday (that's 3 days) using their resources. And half of those were homeless, thrown out of their homes by parents who rejected them. With speaker after speaker, my heart was burning and I felt the power of love.

As you ponder the mysterious ways that you notice your heart burning, and how you are going to Pass it On, I'm going to leave you with a story written by Presbyterian minister and author Fred Craddock. This is his story as told by Craddock: ⁴

Fred was in Winnipeg to give a lecture and had been told to just bring a light jacket. Well it snowed hard! The conference was cancelled as were all flights. He was left to go from his hotel to the café at the bus station. When he got there it was packed and the only item on the menu was soup. It was awful soup, and Fred just sat there warming his hand on it. Into the café came a lady who sat down and ordered a glass of water. When the waiter told her she couldn't stay if she didn't order something, everyone got up to leave.



She stayed and the waiter brought her a cup of soup. Everyone started to eat again, and all you could hear was slurping soup, soup that Fred said now tasted good. It tasted just a little bit like bread and wine.



Christ is Risen!
Alleluia!
Amen.

⁴ Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, (Chalice Press, 2001), 83-84.

Let us pray.

Risen Christ, You appear to us in ways that we find mysterious. Lift our hearts. Change our perspective. Bring joy to our despair. Give us living hope. Fill us with the desire to meet you through the hungry, thirsty, stranger, sick, prisoner. Encounter us as we worship you. Make our hearts burn and in turn let us pass on our experiences to others. Amen.