

Luke 24:13-35
May 8 2011

Hearts Warmed By Christ

I had known him for ten years, I had spoken to him on the phone about a year earlier, he was my roommate at seminary, yet there he stood in front of me, face to face and I did not recognize him. You see it was all out of context. I did not expect to see him at my church in Maryland. I thought he lived in Louisville. I knew him from New York. And Sunday Mornings are full of duties and there were always loads of visitors at the last congregation I served. My mind was partitioned and I could not bring the past into the present. I could not make sense of the situation. And there I stood stumbling for at least 18 seconds that seemed like two hours trying to come up with Bill's name. Something kept my eyes from recognizing him.

This has happened to you hasn't it? You see someone you know but you just can't find that file in the computer of your brain. Your eyes are kept from recognizing the soul. Sometimes faith is like that. God walks along side of us each day. God breaks in often, probably every hour, but our hearts distracted somehow cloak our eyes and recognition seems just out of reach.

Sometimes Easter is like that. It's hard to recognize Jesus in Chocolate bunnies, hard to find resurrection in plastic eggs, difficult get hope from a jellybean. Not that the Easter Bunny does any great damage to Jesus. Ann Weems a Presbyterian Poet even asks "Does Bunny Bashing lead people to love the lamb" of God who is Jesus?¹ Did I say Easter? That was two weeks ago yes, but Easter is not just a Sunday it's a seven week church season. And sometimes during this season and many days in life we just don't seem to capture the resurrection. We can't seem to recognize the Risen Christ

Our story from Luke is a intriguing tale of two disciples who have heavy hearts and "easteropia". On Easter night, they look at Jesus and do not recognize him. They walk along side of him, engage in discussion and learn from his words, but their vision is clouded; their insight blocked. True they are walking west, from Jerusalem to Emmaus, into a setting sun and perhaps their vision is impaired by the glare and brightness. Kaity Gaurin one of our confirmands says in her statement of faith that God is the light at the end of a dark tunnel. These two can only see the tunnel. The three day old experience of witnessing the crucifixion is so shockingly imprinted in their faculties

¹ Bunny And Basket – A poem in Kneeling in Jerusalem, 1992 Westminster John Knox page 48

that they cannot conceive of the possibility that the person with them is the Risen Christ. Like a bright sun can burn a spot on your retina; the crucifixion has damaged the perception of these two pilgrims. Each of us has crucifixions in our lives that damage our sight and dent our insight.

Their religious leaders had failed Cleopas and his companion. Their rabbi had been crucified and their destination was a place of trauma and defeat. Right around the time of Jesus birth, the village of Emmaus was burned by the Romans in 4 BCE for participating in revolts. Two thousand rebels were crucified by Rome in that year.² Rome knew how to keep order. Emmaus therefore wasn't just a geographical location. It was an emotional state. In a murky mood of melancholy, Cleopas and his companion were heading to a destination of despondency.

The Physical appearance did not help these two to recognize the resurrected Jesus. Their lives at this point are disconnected. In other Gospels Mary complains and cries to the Gardener that they have taken her Jesus away, but it is Jesus to whom she is talking. Simon Peter does not recognize the stranger on the shore who tells him

² Barbara Rossing in *New Proclamation* 2005, Fortress Press Minneapolis, page 31

where to fish. This stranger is Jesus. Something about Easter is hard to recognize.

These two who walk west at this moment they could very well be vulnerable to easy answers or to give up on God altogether. Perhaps they are ripe for exploitation? When Jesus came up beside them they merely glanced to see if the stranger was carrying a sword or looked dangerous. Fears satisfied, the heads were turned down again in a continuing anti-celebration of grieving. Grief is like that. CS Lewis writes that grief over the death of his wife, lead him to “loathe even the slightest effort.”³ Grief paralyses. How do the Christian Churches in the country of Iraq keep up their hope when they are under constant attack by Muslim radicals? Many of them moved to Syria. What will happen to them if Syria’s simmering revolution ushers in an Iran like government?

There he was right in front of them and they did not even know it was Jesus. We come In here on any given Sunday wishing perhaps that we could have been Cleopas or his companion walking and breaking bread with Jesus. Then we would know for sure. What a pair of space cadets – they had the gift but couldn’t open their hearts to

³ A Grief Observed by CS Lewis Bantam 1961 page 3

it. On the other hand maybe not; perhaps these two disciples are a great comfort to us. Today we must look elsewhere than the physical body to know that Jesus has risen from the dead.

What an eye opener it was for these sojourners in suffering to learn the scriptures personally from Jesus to break bread with him in Emmaus. What a Joy. What a shock. What a wonderful surprise. When he was at table with them, he took bread blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Sometimes faith is just like that – One minute you have it – insight and knowledge – the next minute Jesus disappears from your sight. Looking back these two sojourners realized that their hearts were burning while he taught and walked with them. Something warmed them and it wasn't the knowledge that the man next to them was Jesus. They were warmed by witness and word. Liza Foster one of our confirmands writes, "I see the Holy Spirit when people are brought together by their faith. For example, when the younger kids stand on the steps on Sunday mornings and sing with huge smiles on their faces. I sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit greatly at the Logos Conference.

John Wesley was a commanding preacher and an organizing genius, he decided to enter ministry at a young age. But Wesley went through some difficult times in his early thirties. A love relationship failed, she married someone else and he began to doubt his call to ministry.

An Excerpt from the Journal of John Wesley, May 24, 1738

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, **I felt my heart strangely warmed.** I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.⁴

John Wesley was already a Christian, already a minister but while hearing what Martin Luther had to say about the book of Romans his heart was warmed. He did not have fireworks. He did not lay down on the floor and convulse. His heart was strangely warmed and for the first time in his life he discovered the joy in faith.

⁴ David Lowes Watson is Director, Office of Pastoral Formation, Tennessee and Memphis Annual Conferences, Nashville, TN. From the Web

That warming of heart set John Wesley on a course to start what eventually became the Methodist Church one of the largest protestant denominations in our nation. Wesley had been ordained for about 8 years, his father was a Pastor and he was raised in the bosom of the church. Jesus walked right next to him for thirty years yet he did not recognize Christ until he went unwillingly and grumbling to a Bible Study. Trisha Franklin one of our confirmands writes that Our Lord is the shoe in our closet that best fits us. This shoe has a great arch and is best for supporting us..... Through confirmation I am choosing the Lord to be my shoe, who will help me on journey through life by supporting and always being with me.

Coming to faith in God, coming to understand the working of the spirit in the world, coming to recognize the love and wisdom of Christ Jesus is an eye opening, heart strangely warming thing. It seems like that for many of us the heavens don't open up, a dove does not descend, a lightning bolt does not flash, a stone does not roll away, an angel does not announce; but that from within our soul we start to feel a warming, like from a camp fire and we suddenly but gently and warmly realize that Jesus has been walking next to us for quite

sometime now. Its a freeing thing, its uplifting, its a relief. It's a resurrection moment of quietly remarkable recognition.

You know there is a difference between hearts warmed by Christ and boiling blood. This week when it was announced that Osama Bin Laden was killed there was spontaneous celebration in New York at ground zero and in front of the White House and other places. College age adults in particular who were in Middle School in 2001 celebrated. IN some way their whole thinking lives had been clouded by terrorism and 9/11, I could understand their reaction and then the debates began. Should we celebrate the death of a man even a terrorist? Our faith would tell us no. Hearts strangely warmed should find it strange to celebrate a death. AT the same time I think it is right to thank our Intelligence community and our military for a tough job now completed. They worked at this for ten years and I have no doubts that in a small way we are safer, maybe in a large way. Celebrate no, relieved, safer thankful and appreciative yes.

Today we confirm six young women nurtured in the Presbyterian Church and we baptize a seventh. Confirmation class has very much been a conversation this year. The purpose of the class, my conversational goal is to help each disciple understand that in church

and in life they have been walking next to the Risen Christ. Not always and perhaps not often aware, still Jesus has walked next to them and in the church their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Confirmation and Adult Baptism is personal commitment to a God who will never gossip behind my back writes Abby Havermann “Jesus is like a mother, protecting us, leading us, and teaching us.” Says Stephanie Schaefer. “I believe God is like a really good friend who forgives you no matter how bad you mess up. The kind of friend who will always have your back and you can always turn to for guidance.” Writes Sam Lauer. “I believe God is like an umbrella. I do not mean that we are at all times we are protected from others, but with our faith, our spiritual well being is nourished and fulfilled. Even if our troubles get the best of us and times get difficult we will receive because God is with us in all times. Mary Martin”

These two travelers in the Gospel of Luke end up being a great comfort to us, because they come to their faith in the resurrection, the same way we journey. They did not yet believe the resurrection. They didn't know what to make of the story of the empty tomb. They did not recognize Jesus. They came to their faith through scripture and through the Eucharist. They came to warm hearts by journeying with

fellow pilgrims. They said to each other right after he vanished from their sight, " Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us. Eyes Opened and hearts warmed they recognized Christ.

Today we lay our Forward in Faith Pledges on the Communion Table for a Building an edifice a structure. We don't revere it, we use it. We don't protect it from use, it protects us and houses us so that we can worship, so that we can serve the homeless and walk next to children who become young adults who decide with hearts warmed to be confirmed to be disciples. Like our confirmands we make a commitment to move Forward in Faith because our building at its core provides us with the ability to warm hearts with the love of Christ. As we journey through the Easter season, I pray that our hearts will be warmed and our eyes opened so that we will recognize to the presence of the Risen Christ.