

FBC Service Sunday April 7, 2024, Burning Hearts on the Road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-34

The longest walk you'll ever take is the walk away from the grave of someone you love. If you've never done that, you can't imagine how difficult it is.

- To walk away and feel as if the world has come to an end.
- To walk away and think about what used to be and what might have been.
- To walk away and realize, "It will never be the same again."
- To play over and over in your mind the good times, the laughter, the crazy stories.
- To reach out and touch a face and find it gone forever.
- To cry until you can't cry anymore.
- To watch them bury your dreams and hopes and all that was good about life.
- To know it's over, done, finished, the end, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Our story unfolds in Luke 24. Two disciples are sadly walking on the road to Emmaus, a little village about seven miles from Jerusalem.

They were followers of the man called Jesus, the teacher and miracle worker who claimed to have been sent by God. For a long time they had followed him. As much as anyone could, they truly believed.

Then came the terrible events on Friday when Jesus had been crucified and later buried.

Although they'd heard rumours that his tomb had been found empty early that morning, they could not and would not and did not believe any wild stories about a resurrection. Now they're going home.

As they walked and talked, I'm sure they did a lot of reminiscing. They must have talked about the time the man on the pallet was lowered through the roof to be healed. Surely they talked about the time when Jesus took five barley loaves and two fish and fed 5000 men.

They probably wondered how Jesus could raise Lazarus and then be killed himself a week later. Like anyone who's lost a loved one, they tried to make sense out of the tragedy. Their dreams and hopes were crushed.

If you've ever walked away from a funeral so deeply moved that you couldn't speak, you know what it was like for these two disciples.

Down the Emmaus Road they walked, deep in their sorrow and despair. Leaving Jerusalem, there were few other people who were more broken hearted in the whole world.

Suddenly a stranger joins them and walks with them. **When he leaves them, they're changed forever.**

What's happened? Something had changed inside them. They now have burning hearts. When you hear the question, **'How do we get burning hearts,'** then you have to look at this incident? It's the recipe for making cold hearts warm.

First, their hearts are burdened.

Then their hearts are burning.

Then their hearts are bursting.

What a transformation!

Such is the power of the risen Christ! This is a message of hope for all who are confused and uncertain. It's also a message for those who feel abandoned by the Lord. Because he rose from the dead, Jesus is with us always, everywhere, at all times, in every situation.

Verse 16 says that *"their eyes were kept from recognizing him."*

Why didn't they know it was Jesus? After all, they were his disciples. Some say they didn't expect him, so they didn't recognize him.

Others say that it happened at sunset, so they were confused by the fading light. **But our text gives us a different answer.** It was a supernatural veiling of their eyesight, so they saw a man but didn't know it was Jesus.

There's even a touch of humour in that Jesus is with them and they think he's dead.

As they walked with the stranger, they said, "He used to do this," and "You should have been there," and "He could walk on water," and "He was so kind," and "We never met anyone like him," and, finally, "I can't believe he's gone."

On and on they walk, the two men talking, the stranger listening intently. Finally, he breaks in and asks, **"What are you talking about?"**

The question perplexes the two men, because everyone in Jerusalem knew about the crucifixion of Jesus.

"Are you the only one who hasn't heard?" And so they tell the story to this inquisitive stranger, their words a combination of love and grief, pride and sorrow, belief and doubt.

"He was such a good man."

"He healed the sick."

"He raised the dead."

“We know he was a prophet.”

“He ran into trouble with the chief priests.”

“We heard he was betrayed.”

“They beat him until he couldn’t stand.”

“They put a crown of thorns on his head.”

“Then they mocked him.”

Everything they said was in the past tense, which is how we normally speak of the dead.

They clung to every cherished memory. Crucifixion couldn’t make them stop loving him.

But they couldn’t square the events of the past 48 hours with their faith that he was the Son of God.

They were disappointed disciples who felt their faith slipping away with every step on the road to Emmaus. They’d heard the rumours of an empty tomb, but what did that mean? No one had seen Jesus yet, or so they assumed.

As the two disciples pour out their confusion and despair, Jesus listens patiently. When they’re finished telling of their broken dreams and dashed hopes, he begins to speak. **He calls them foolish, which simply means they were slow to apply the truth they already knew.**

And he says they are **“slow of heart”** to believe what the prophets had said. **He rebukes them for one thing and only one thing**—for failing to understand and apply the Scriptures. He doesn’t upbraid them for leaving Jerusalem and walking back home. He doesn’t criticize their doubt or condemn their confusion.

All of that was perfectly understandable given the circumstances, and the fragmentary information they had received. But he tells them they should’ve known and believed what God had said.

As they walked the Emmaus Road, Cleopas and his friend had all the facts and all the points, but not the faith. Soon they would come to believe through the filter of the resurrection.

In our passage today, the disciples were missing the living words of Jesus, to help them make sense of all that had happened. **Today, we don’t have that excuse**, and we’ve heard the requisite of what it is to follow Jesus, and we see it through the reality of the resurrection.

That leads to what we might call the ultimate Bible conference.

Jesus tells them plainly that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and die on the cross.

No one took his life.

He laid it down.

The cross was not an accident.

And as the afternoon of the first Easter Sunday wore on, the two disciples listened with rapt attention as the third man, the stranger they didn't recognize, explained how the Scriptures all pointed to Christ.

We mustn't make the same mistake these two disciples made, or else we too will be foolish and slow of heart to believe. The Old Testament is full of Christ.

He's the true theme of the Old Testament - **by type, teaching, sacrifice and prophecy.**

He's the prophet greater than Moses.

He's the priest greater than Aaron.

He's the king greater than David.

He's the captain greater than Joshua. And so much more!

He's the seed of the woman, the fulfillment of the brass serpent, the goal of all the sacrifices, and the true meaning of the tabernacle. He's the Kinsman Redeemer, the Scapegoat, and the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

He's the great high priest who lives forever to intercede for us. He's the lion of the tribe of Judah, and the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

If you want to find Jesus, just open your Bible because the whole book is about him. The whole purpose of the Bible is to point us to him. **He's the theme from Genesis to Revelation.**

We're reminded here of OT sufficiency and necessity. Too often today in the pursuit of relevance and influence, the Church finds itself embarrassed by the canon of the Old Testament.

The world around us tells us that it's archaic, dangerous, or just wrong. **Then either through ignorance or explicit action, we start to set it aside.** Even within evangelical circles, as we declare the sufficiency of Scripture, we too often practice something else.

How much of our Sunday preaching centres in the Gospels or Letters, and (bar the odd funeral sermon from Psalm 23) implicitly ignores the Old Testament.

Yet evangelicals can also be guilty by ignoring or passing over those passages we know will draw rebuke and world disdain.

Yet, in three verses in this passage, we're challenged to consider our entire approach to the Old Testament: How does this walk along the Emmaus Road challenge us in this way?

Because, to explain himself this was what Jesus used. He began “*with Moses and all the Prophets, and explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*” (24:27) Meaning, the Old Testament was sufficient to point to and help explain the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Today let’s remind ourselves of the central importance of the word of God to our walk with Jesus.

How powerful a sermon this stranger must have given them as their hearts are described as burning. Thus, the final challenge we find in this passage is the weight and consideration we give to the preaching of God’s word in our lives and the lives of our Church.

Jesus chose to first teach these two followers so that they could understand all things relating to him. Today we’re reminded of the central importance that preaching should have in the life of the Church. **Good biblical exposition is necessary to making Jesus known in our churches and communities.**

Jesus expounded the word of God in a logical and coherent manner. He didn’t pick a few verses and then go where the wind took him, he started with Moses, and then worked from there.

It was not the sharing of a few abstract and spiritual thoughts that sounded nice; **no**, he opened the word of God and through his knowledge and experience of it, brought it to life. He taught in a way that helped these two men understand afresh biblical texts they had known their whole lives.

This should be what we expect and demand of all the teaching that we sit under: that it helps us to understand the passage, that it’s true to the word, and that it points to Jesus and brings glory to him.

The outcome of good preaching is clear to see from this passage: Jesus is lifted up! The effect is that those who listen know more about him, and what it means to live for him. This should be the intended outcome of every sermon preached, and the expectation of those who hear it preached.

We see later in this passage (v32) the effect that true biblical preaching should have. It should kindle something in all the hearts of those who hear it.

This is what we see as Jesus preaches. A new fire and passion for Jesus Christ burns within them. Good preaching should leave you desiring more of Jesus Christ, it should affect your heart.

Jesus taught in such a way that their hearts burned with passion and hope, and something was birthed in them, and suddenly the whole narrative of Scripture made sense. It was such a decisive moment that the image used here is of something being set ablaze.

Like a dropped match turning into a raging house fire; the spark of Jesus teaching had caught in their hearts, and they would never be the same.

Too often within our churches, the preaching has the veneer of Gospel, **but not the heart.** It sounds like the good news of Jesus, but when it is considered against the Scriptures, it lacks Jesus.

This is the most dangerous preaching, something close to the truth but not entirely true. Moral rather than Gospel; person-focused rather than Christ-exalting. Where Grace is preached, but 'effort' is elevated:

I find great encouragement from this story. Jesus is with us even when we're slow to believe.

Verses 28-32 paint a touching picture of Jesus eating supper with Cleopas and the other disciple. Remember, they still don't know who he is. They think they've stumbled upon a stranger who knows everything there is to know about the Bible. **They have no idea it's Jesus.**

There's one little phrase in verse 28 we shouldn't overlook. Jesus **"acted as if he were going farther."**

Was Jesus planning on leaving them alone on the road of doubt? **No**, but he makes them think he's going to leave them behind, so that they will invite him to stay.

Our Lord sometimes seems to leave us so that we'll ask him to stay. He seems to leave us behind so we'll seek him all the more.

Those days when we feel alone and confused are part of God's plan to bring us to a place where we say, "O Lord, it's you and you alone that I seek."

Jesus comes in when he's invited. He eats with them.

Jesus disappears, but not until his disciples recognize him.

Our Lord is with us even though he seems to leave us. This is the profound insight of our text.

We're all on the long Emmaus Road journey together. There are times when we feel alone and overwhelmed and doubts creep in, and our heart gives way, and we feel like we can't go on.

Then Jesus comes to us and says, "You never were alone." I was gone from your sight so that I may be seen by your faith. Even when you thought you were alone, I was with you every step of the way."

He's with us even when we don't know it.

He's with us when we think we're walking alone through the dark valleys of life. And even when we've given up all hope, we discover that he was with us when we needed him most.

He's with us always ... even though he seems to leave us.

Even though we don't recognize him. Even though we can't find him. Even though we're slow to believe.

The two disciples couldn't wait to get back to Jerusalem. Even though it was late in the evening, they had to go back and tell the others what they had seen and heard. Once you encounter Christ, **nothing will ever be the same again.**

May we be the people of burning hearts this morning, filled with fervour and enthusiasm and hope?