

Sermon for Easter 3A  
Sunday, April 30, 2017  
“Did not your heart burn within you?”

Text: Luke 24:13-35

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever experienced your heart burning when you met someone unexpectedly in an unusual place? Wherever I travel—doesn't matter where in the world I am going or find myself—I have an uncanny tendency to run into someone I know. It usually takes me a second to make the connection that I know the person, but the context is different, or they recognize me at first and call my name. But when I recognize who the person is, I can feel a burning inside, a compelling feeling in the gut that acknowledges and reinforces my happiness to see them. That must have been something like what the disciples felt who were on the road to Emmaus the day they met Jesus there. The lesson from the Gospel today is the account from Luke's Gospel of the conversation between Jesus, Cleopas, and another person whose name we do not know while on the road to Emmaus. It follows the short account of the Resurrection when the tomb was found empty. Luke does not give us many details about the finding of the empty tomb—not in the way that John did, at least—but Luke found it important to provide the details of what happened next. Despite the brief resurrection account, this story continues a theme that began at Easter when Mary Magdalene ran to the remaining eleven disciples—remember, Judas was no longer with them—to tell them, “I have seen the Lord.” Have you noticed that theme that has been underscoring our Gospel lessons during Eastertide? Indeed, we have seen the Lord.

Emmaus was a town about seven miles from Jerusalem, and this scene is meant to represent the beginning of the good news being carried from Jerusalem out into the world, but it starts out in the despair that followed the crucifixion. The crucifixion left the followers of Jesus wondering what would happen next. The two characters in today's gospel passage were on the road to Emmaus to go back home to their everyday lives, to pick up the pieces after the sad events of Jesus' passion and death. Cleopas and his companion were ready to go back to “business as usual” when they were met by Jesus, whom they thought was a stranger, who asked them what they were talking about. Jesus' pretended ignorance

opens up an opportunity for them to express how they felt at this moment: disillusioned, disappointed, jaded, betrayed, bereaved, and probably somewhat confused. They had so much hope that the one whom they thought was the Messiah would save Israel, but those hopes were dashed. And even though they had heard the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead, they did not believe it in their hearts. At first, they did not recognize Jesus, just as Mary did not recognize him at the tomb. Perhaps this is a hint of what our own resurrection bodies will look like at the end of the ages, something that would be unrecognizable to us right now. Cleopas and his companion were even annoyed that this “stranger” on the road did not know about the events that had taken place.

We have all had “Road to Emmaus” moments in our lives, haven’t we? That time we ran into someone we knew at an unexpected time and place. Those times when we’re returning from something that moved us. You know what I’m talking about: those times when we come down from a high point event. Perhaps it is the airline flight home after a fantastic vacation; or, perhaps it is the ride home after a great concert or play, or maybe even after a spiritually moving experience in worship. Maybe we experienced a moment as we were cleaning up following a meaningful dinner with our families or friends. Some “Emmaus moments” are easy to remember, because they are times when we can acknowledge the goodness of God without even trying or thinking about it, but there are other “road to Emmaus” moments that are not so pleasant—times when we have experienced trouble in our lives, such as hardship, or loss. When we face personal tragedy, natural or human disaster, acts of terrorism, and such, these are the times when we might have trouble recognizing the movement of God in our lives or in the world. The scene from the Gospel was such a moment. The two on the road to Emmaus probably struggled to find God in the days following the Jesus’ crucifixion. The scene was more than just the story of Jesus’ appearance to two travelers on their way back home. It was a time of great sorrow for Cleopas and his traveling companion. For us, the story speaks to the times in our lives when we can recognize the presence of God with us and those when we cannot. What are the “Road to Emmaus” moments you’ve had in your own life? All too often we are blinded by our own ambitions, goals, and wants. We are distracted by the things that stress us in our lives, like our jobs, our homes, our relationships, among our friends; we become so

distracted that we cannot recognize the good news of Jesus Christ. Those things can make us question if there is any hope left.

This story can help restore our hope during troubling times. Though the two travelers did not recognize Jesus, he was right there with them all along. They opened themselves up and shared what was troubling them with Jesus, and he opened up an opportunity for them to know God more fully and to better recognize God's power and his love for us. Jesus revealed himself to them, and their hope was reinvigorated. When we have those "road to Emmaus" moments in our own lives, Jesus walks alongside us as well. If we look carefully, then we will recognize him. If we open ourselves up to God in those moments, we can see his presence more clearly.

The encounter with Jesus was a powerful moment: the travelers were together on the road, then the scriptures were opened up to them, then they shared a meal in which the risen Christ was revealed to them, then they shared the good news with others. That models what we do as Christians when we gather as we are doing right now, when we have the Scriptures opened up to us as I am trying to do, when we share in the Eucharistic meal in which the Real Presence of Christ will be revealed to us, and then when we share the good news of Christ out into the world. Our hearts should be burning within us, because we are in the midst of a "road to Emmaus" moment right now. Amen.