

“Living with Heartburn”

April 17, 2016

Hidden in Plain Sight series – 4th Sunday of Easter

It's been a couple of weeks since I shared with you about my friend's mom, Hazel, and I wanted to show you the picture that I described. Hazel was an example of resurrection for me as we celebrated the gift of new life and hope that the risen Jesus offers. I told you about Hazel, but I wanted to show you, too.

We're looking at those instances when Jesus appears after resurrection - those unexpected times when Jesus was "hidden in plain sight" and what happened when people saw him. Jimmy and Kim shared with you from the Gospel of John – "doubting Thomas" and "denying Peter." Both of them reminded us that resurrection changes us. It's a transformation - not just far off, but right now as we claim faith in the One who is risen - Jesus.

Today we come back to the Gospel of Luke. Remember that the women met two men at the empty tomb who asked why they were looking for Jesus who was alive. So the women went back to the others and told them. And remember what some of them said? Oh, they're just gossiping! They're just telling tales.

It's on that same day that a man named Cleopas and a friend are going away from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. I invite you to watch and see how it might have happened - how they began with burdened hearts but ended with hearts bursting to share Good News. (video)

Did you notice the fear in Cleopas and the other man at first? They were settling on a story to tell anyone who might ask. I think we forget that this time after Jesus' death is still a scary time for his followers. Heavy hearts, broken dreams, dashed hopes. Hopeless. Helpless. Burdened hearts. But when the stranger joins them, they are quick to share about what happened to Jesus.

It's not surprising that this encounter with the risen Christ is one of the more famous in Scripture. Artists have painted some beautiful, powerful paintings. Most of the earlier depictions focus on Cleopas and his friend meeting Jesus at the table, but later depictions of this encounter focus much more on meeting Jesus on the way. The focus changes from the moment of recognition to the journey itself. There's something about the journey with Jesus.

Some of you may be familiar with the Walk to Emmaus - a time of spiritual renewal that inspires and encourages people to deeper faith. There's something about Cleopas and his friend on this 7-mile walk that intrigues us. Maybe we like the fact that

they don't recognize Jesus at first. We know the rest of the story, and it's exciting to watch it unfold.

We use and hear that phrase "walking with Jesus" a lot. A life of faith really is a journey walking with Jesus rather than arriving at a particular place and having it all figured out. I find myself with a lot more "I don't know"s rather than certainty. We have spiritual highs and lows along the way, but we walk by faith and not by sight. The Emmaus story speaks to a journey that we're all on: walking with Jesus sometimes without knowing the fullness of his presence until later on.

I think our Gospel writer wants us to put ourselves in the place of the other person who walks with Cleopas. That's why there's no name given. And maybe that's a part of the intrigue and the power of this encounter. It's for all of us!

If you've been walking with Jesus for a long time, even if you can't remember your life without him, still this journey brings new insight as the Scriptures are opened. Cleopas and his friend were a part of the crowd around Jesus. Remember what they say? "We had hoped that he'd be the one to set Israel free!" If you feel fairly new to this walk with Jesus, I hope you can see yourself as one whom Jesus comes to and receives as loved.

I love the disciples' question: "Weren't our hearts burning when he was talking to us on the road?" On that dusty, deserted road, a 7-mile trek from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Jesus was the stranger who listened to their pain about lost dreams and hopes. He was the stranger who told them his story—God's story—as he opened up the Scriptures to them. Sometimes our hearts know more than our heads, and we have to notice that Jesus joins them even though they're not sure. They're confused, sad, and vulnerable.

Jesus shared himself with them, yet it wasn't until they sat together around a table that they realized who he was. It wasn't until they invited him in that they realized who he was and all that he had done. It wasn't until he was gone that they realized their burning hearts. This wasn't a stranger at all, but these two men needed to take the journey in order to really meet him.

The walk to Emmaus reminds us that we're at our best when we keep walking with Jesus - in community. Discipleship is not a drive-by or fly-by process where we look for instant results and ignore the people and places we whiz by every day. Our lives are a journey of following Jesus and learning from him, but also looking *for* him in the faces of strangers who join us on the way. Even when we come together in worship, we look at the face of Christ on each other! I hope it encourages us to look for Jesus outside, too.

Todd was our best man in our wedding. In the time that I've known Todd, he has been a wonderful friend to Ivan and to me. He is generous. He is genuine. Some of you know that Todd experienced serious heart issues a few years ago. A virus attacked his heart and weakened it to a point where he was on a machine that helped his heart pump. It was just over a year ago that Todd received a heart transplant.

We have talked to Todd since then, but it was after Easter during our stay in Baltimore that we saw him for the first time since his heart transplant. I was overwhelmed when we first talked to him after his surgery, and I was overjoyed to spend time with him and his family.

First, we went to an IHOP. And in the midst of a busy restaurant, I found myself staring at Todd. I told him not to be freaked out by it, and he wasn't. It was just incredible to think that God's grace and wisdom working through medical science could even make it possible for him to be sitting in front of me. I asked Todd about how he felt, what he could or couldn't do, what restrictions he had.

It was interesting to hear him talk about how he has to be careful and aware of the beating of his heart. Friends, I realized how much I take for granted. How many of us pay attention to our heart beating – to our breathing? It was incredible to hear him talk about how healthy he feels compared to before the transplant.

It was amazing to think about the gift of life from another human being given that Todd might live - to love his wife and children, to go duck pin bowling with his friends, to work, and to simply be alive. To watch him enjoy a meal and help his young son go duckpin bowling was a truly holy time.

Yes, Jesus' presence is known - the grace of God is real - in the breaking of bread. Certainly there's a reminder of Jesus' presence with us in Holy Communion. Cleopas and his friend recognize Jesus when he sits with them and breaks the bread. But Jesus' presence isn't limited to the Communion table. Sometimes we notice Jesus with us in the eating of pancakes around the table in an IHOP. My heart was burning because I heard and saw God's grace and power at work in Todd - deeply grateful for life and hope and deeply thankful for friends along the way.

Walter Brueggemann says, "The walk with the risen Christ is an ongoing process of having our anxiety transformed in faith, and our despair transformed in hope." That's what I see when I put myself on this journey with Cleopas – this process of a change of heart.

First, burdened hearts carrying fear, anxiety, and uncertainty about dashed hopes for God's work in the world. Then burning hearts as we welcome a stranger to share our burden and hear him talk about God's promises. Then when we see Jesus - this one we thought was a stranger - our hearts are bursting to share this incredible news.

Transformation doesn't stop with us. Cleopas and his friend talk about their hearts burning, but they don't stay there. The possibility of transformation and God's continued presence goes with us into the world where there are incredible joys and deep sorrows, where there is resurrection and brokenness.

Friends, I hope that our hearts burn today with a passion to love Jesus who is risen and who is with us and serve the world that Jesus loves. If you're here with a burden, I hope you can let Jesus help you carry it. I pray that as we walk together that the moment of seeing Jesus isn't the end. I hope we talk to each other about it, but we have to go beyond that.

Living with burning hearts means that we're driven to share what we know. Cleopas and his friend go back to Jerusalem. They get it. They aren't living in fear; they have hope. Their eyes are opened, and from there they go out as witnesses.

I know it's been three weeks since we said these words together, but I hope the fire is still burning in our hearts - or I hope it can be rekindled in us.

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!**

Thanks be to God. AMEN.