

“Heartburn”

Text: Psalm 116; Luke 24:13-35
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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?” Luke 24:32

We have had a little crisis in our family this past week. It all started when my husband and I returned from a trip to Richmond, where we had gone to see our grandchildren – and of course their parents. When we got in Sunday night, there was hanging on the front doorknob a notice informing us of an attempt to deliver a package to Alfred Adams. It said that a signature of the recipient of the package was required in order for the package to be left at the residence. Since that notice had Al’s name on it and not mine, I decided not to get involved. A couple of days later, I asked whom the package was from, assuming that Al had gotten things all straightened out. He said, “Well, I called Federal Express and asked that very question. I was told the package had been mailed from Kinko’s. I didn’t know anything about anybody who was sending me a package from Kinko’s.”

“What did you tell the lady?”

“I told her I couldn’t sit around all day at home waiting to receive a package. The lady said, ‘What do you want me to do with the package, Mr. Adams?’ Why don’t you just send it back where it came from?” Al said.

Thus endeth the conversation with Federal Express. Two days passed. Our daughter calls from California to thank Al for a book, a package he has just sent her. “By the way, Dad,” she says, “the bike ought to be arriving in Atlanta any day now.”

“What bike?” Al asked.

“The one I told you a couple of weeks ago I was going to be shipping.” (She is coming to see us and she wanted the bike to be here when she was.)

The bike that Elizabeth had taken apart, carefully packed, the bike that she had then taken to Kinko’s in Los Angeles, California.

By this time, the bike was on its way back across the continental United States to Los Angeles, California. As you can imagine, a difference of opinion has arisen as to how much time passed between when the heads-up was given about the bike's arrival and the day that little infamous notice got hung on the doorknob.

There is also a difference of opinion as to why in any case, one would send a Federal Express package back to where it had come from. Suppose it contained a check for \$1 million? An original Rembrandt? My mind went wild with these things. If my sweet mother hadn't been deceased I would have said, "It might have been my mother sending us my baby shoes, bronzed, for us to keep forever!"

Al said, "I get a lot of things by Federal Express that I don't want to get."

I said, "I suspect some of us are just more curious than the rest of us." I know that all of us are capable of getting ourselves in awkward situations because of a lack of knowledge, a lack of awareness. If Al had had any awareness that Elizabeth had sent the package, he would have moved heaven and earth to receive it.

Here's another case in point about the kinds of holes we can dig because of lack of recognition, awareness, or information. In the early 1990s I was to receive an honorary degree from a fine southern college. I had been instructed to report to a certain room in the administration building just prior to the graduation ceremony. I walked into that room and discovered that I was the second person to arrive. The first person to arrive – the only one in the room – was the other honorary degree recipient, someone I knew by reputation, a prominent business man. He looked at me, and I looked at him, and I as I was about to extend my hand, he said, "Would you mind getting me a cup of coffee?" I have never been more intent on a mission in my life than I was to find that fellow a cup of coffee, because I knew that when I handed it to him, or soon thereafter, he would realize that I was the other honoree. It was a sweet moment, I have to say.

This lack of recognition, lack of knowledge can get people into some very awkward situations. Today's Day 1 preacher, Donovan Drake suggests that in fact "it is this lack of recognition that empowers today's story from the gospel of Luke." The risen Lord has joined Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, and they absolutely do not recognize him. They have no idea who he is. As he walks along beside them, he asks them, "Who were you talking about as you walked along?"

They say to him, "Are you the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't know about the things that have taken place there in recent days?"

"What things?" the stranger asks. And they tell him about it. Jesus, well before his death, had told his followers what would happen, just as the prophets

predicted: he, the Son of Man would have to go to Jerusalem, would be handed over; he would be mocked and insulted, flogged and killed, and on the third day would rise from the dead. He had told them, but they had forgotten. These two, Cleopas and the other, who had placed their hopes in Jesus, who had likely been eye-witnesses to his death, could not see the risen Lord standing right beside them. Their hearts and minds were so full of discouragement that their eyes could not see.

Have you even been in a terrible mood and your partner or friend says, “Oh look at this! Isn’t this great?”

And you say, “Yeah, yeah, that’s great.” Whatever it is, it doesn’t look great to you.

I do not know why Jesus did not tell them on the Road to Emmaus who he was, even as he spent the entire afternoon teaching them and explaining what the scriptures had to say about the Messiah. He did not tell them, and they did not see him as the Son of God and the conqueror of death.

I remember a story about Albert Einstein and how one day he was riding the train between Princeton and New York City when a young college student sat down beside him. “What do you do?” the student asked the Nobel Prize winning physicist.

Professor Einstein said, “I study physics.”

“Physics! I finished that last semester.”

Sometimes our eyes are blind to the worth of others; sometimes it is an inflated ego that makes us that way, but sometimes it is deflated hope that keeps us from seeing. The road to Emmaus was literally alive with the presence of God, and the two didn’t know it. It’s hard to blame them though. The skies were dark with hopelessness in and around Jerusalem. Those who had loved Jesus had been through the lowest of the low. These two were getting out of town, but not because there was something wonderful waiting for them in Emmaus. They were going to Emmaus for one reason – it wasn’t Jerusalem. They wanted to leave the scene. Emmaus doesn’t exist on most modern maps, but I would imagine that just about everyone in this sanctuary today has been to Emmaus and been there more than once. It is the place you go when you want to get away from what has broken your heart, from what has made you doubt yourself, from what has made you decide that the universe no longer is working right. Frederick Buechner says that Emmaus is the place we go to escape – a bar, a movie, wherever it is we can throw up our hands and say “let everything be hanged.” (1)

I remember the clerk of session at a church I once served. She is a wonderful person and is beautiful enough to be a model. She is also faithful enough to be a

missionary, which is not to say there are not beautiful missionaries. The session of the church really got the best of her one Sunday. She had introduced a new plan for serving communion that she and I thought would take less time. She diligently walked the session through the new plan. The time came for the Lord's Supper to be served. The elders came forward, got the elements, walked down out of the chancel, and utter chaos broke loose. Some of the elders skipped whole sections of the sanctuary and returned to the table with full trays. Others ran out of elements three times before they were done. They wandered up and down the aisles, trying to find out where they were supposed to be. I called the clerk the next day to offer a word of comfort. She thanked me. She told me that all she could think of to do on Sunday afternoon when she got home from church was to go into the kitchen cabinet, grab a jumbo bag of Hershey's Kisses and go to bed. Anything to escape!

According to a poll done by the *New York Times* and CBS released just last week, Americans are as unhappy and as dissatisfied as they have been in the past 20 years. Democrats, Republicans, city, rural, college-educated, high school graduates, 81% indicate they believe that things have gotten seriously off track. This is up from 69% just a year ago. There's a lot of frustration, anger and disappointment in American society. Pessimism too.

Many of us are walking down the road to tomorrow with a sense of darkening clouds over our head. Cleopas and his friend told the stranger at their side, "We had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel, but it's been three days already and there is no sign of him anywhere."

We had hoped. We had hoped that the surge in Iraq would do the trick and finally end the war. We had hoped when we signed those mortgage papers that our homes would keep their value. We had hoped that gas prices would not break our pocketbooks. We had hoped that rivers would be filled with clean water. And we had hoped that traffic would not choke the throat of our city. We had hoped that Ben Bernanke would get the economy going. But none of this has come to pass.

As the three on the road came near the village of Emmaus, the stranger "walked ahead as if he were going on, but the two urged him to stay with them. . .so he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them." At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (Luke 24:28-32) It was not in the teaching on the road, it was when he broke the bread with them. Then, poof! He was gone, leaving them, but not leaving them alone. Leaving them with one another, leaving them with their questions laced with hope: "Were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking to us?" He left them with one another. He left them with redeemed memories and hopeful expectations. And he left them with a job to do, which was to spread the word that he was alive, that he was out there, and

though we might not recognize him at first, he would come to us and be revealed in the ordinary moments of life.

In none of his post-resurrection appearances does Jesus swoop down from above like Superman. In John's gospel, he slips in so quietly beside Mary, she thinks he's the gardener. In Luke, he shows up in the middle of the disciples' conversation, really in the midst of their doubts and fears and speaks to them: "Peace be with you."

He comes to us in the person of the stranger who walks into your life and offers hope. He comes in the ministries of the church, as strangers are welcomed in his name. I could be wrong, but I think Jesus didn't tell those guys out there on the road who he was because if he had, they would never have looked for him anyplace else. They never would have looked for him in the midst of life at its most real, its most basic.

Last Sunday, when we went to church with our family in Richmond, Virginia, it happened to be baptism Sunday. Our four year old grandson Charlie was sitting between his mother and me. He was very interested in what was going on, especially the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. A beautiful little baby about seven months old, bald as a billiard ball, dressed up to a fare-thee-well in the family christening gown, she was in her daddy's arms, as the family stood around the baptismal font. Charlie watched the whole thing in rapt attention. He listened to what the minister was saying, I think, because when the minister paused, Charlie looked up at his mother and asked, "Is that baby Jesus?"

In the baptism of the baby, in the breaking of the bread, in the kindness of a stranger, he really does show up.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "When we get to heaven, we will say to God, 'So it was you all along. Everyone I loved, it was you. Everything decent and fine. Everything that ever happened to me, everything that made me reach out and try to be better, it was you all along.'" (2)

May God give us eyes to see and may the peace of Christ abide with you this day and always.

(1) *The Magnificent Defeat*.

(2) As quoted by Thomas G. Long in *Testimony* Jossey-Bass, 2004, p.126.