

Prescription for Heartburn

Easter 3A – Road to Emmaus

Slide: The Road to Emmaus

Some years ago, I was experiencing some vicious heartburn, the kind where it keeps you up at night. I tried everything: drugs, propping myself up at night, avoiding certain acids in foods, everything! It wasn't until I had a food allergy test that it practically got fixed overnight. Removing gluten and a few other foods practically fixed it overnight. Gone. The heartburn was magically gone and who could have known that it was something as simple as a few foods? I'm certain that a few of you in the pews right now are relating to how awful severe heartburn is, especially when nothing curbs it. So, it may seem wrong that today I am wishing you all heartburn. If you have ever had heartburn, you would probably now be thinking, "why would my pastor wish me heartburn?"

And, that would be cruel, wouldn't it, if I were actually talking about physical heartburn? But, today, when it comes to our scriptures, I'm not talking about the kind of heartburn that causes you to search for Pepcid or Tums in your medicine cabinet. I'm talking about the kind of heartburn that you experience not unlike Cleopas and the other disciple in the Gospel reading describes:

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

Slide: Were not our hearts...

Heartburn, the burning of a heart - that kind of burn only happens when experiencing the sacred, the holy; perhaps you can think of times that happens for you. You may not know why, but you have a sudden feeling as if God is doing something, or you discern a real sensation for direction you did not see or know before. This feeling comes when the Spirit of the risen Christ suddenly walks with you somewhere, even though you do not recognize him. This heartburn gets you going in life,

increases your faith, and changes your life. We, all of us, need this prescription for heartburn.

This is the kind of heartburn that happened with Cleopas and his unnamed friend or possibly his wife, as often women are unnamed in these ancient scriptures. This heartburn happened to them as they walked with a sudden stranger down the road to Emmaus. Like us, these two friends were running away from a very sad event, a blow that seemed to grieve them to the heart. They followed Jesus until his death. They had hope that he was the one to save them, the Messiah. But, clearly, they were leaving Jerusalem to go away from the pain, the sadness. One of the popular contemporary translations of this passage called "The Message" says: "They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend."

Like us, the experience of grief at the loss of a loved one can cause us to be so preoccupied with that grief, that we may not notice the holy in front of us if it hit us in the face. And, unable to see that Jesus was actually with them, these two, not to mention ourselves, they cannot see that Jesus is there, encouraging them, pushing them, and opening up their lives to them. The resurrection of Jesus has changed him so that they cannot see him; for some reason, his appearance is now different, transformed, and no longer relatable. Like Cleopas and his companion, we, too, after recognizing Jesus, may be left to discuss how it was our hearts were burning, and what should we do about it anyway?

Of course, Jesus walks with us all the time, but there are periods of times in our lives when we either are not in a place to see that or we refuse to see the presence of God with us. During the pandemic, it was very difficult to see the leading of Christ for our lives. It was like leading and living in the dark. Sometimes we would stumble upon the right thing but it was often more difficult to see God's leading. Not to say it's crystal clear now, but the sensation of new life is palpable. Where is God leading us into the future? It's exciting! And yet, as humans, it is and may still be difficult to know the direction God would have for us as a community and as individuals. And yet, Christ is there. Are we open to see? Do we have the prescription for heartburn that we all need?

I have had this heartburn. I know what it is to suddenly see Christ in my life where I did not before and if we pay attention more often, we know it's there. Early on in my young life, I could not recognize that Christ was leading me towards where I am today. In fact, I was adamant at first to never consider such a thing as ordained ministry. Oh, I knew better than God, you see. As a teenager, I did have a pastor who encouraged me to go to seminary, but I would have none of that. I was a gifted musician and singer and I was determined to become an opera singer! Yep. I sang lots of opera then. In fact, I was going that direction with my musical degrees. And, there is nothing wrong with that. Those goals were wonderful and fine. But, it's not where I was happy. I just simply would not listen. I wouldn't listen to the direction God desired for me. Worship and being with God's people was the place where my heart burned, and one day during Holy Communion, and even as my pastor was singing the parts of the worship service, I remember my eyes were suddenly open, and I saw all the times in my life where God was trying to get this message through to me. I simply was unable to listen until then, or it wasn't the time to listen until then. For Cleopas and his friend, their sudden vision of Jesus brought them back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples.

And for you, it turns out that the remedy for heartburn is the same, although the results may differ, for each of us, of course. There are people in your life; places you have been, and the experiences you have had where Christ was walking with you, and is now walking with you, prodding you, teaching you, pushing you toward something to do for God's glory, and you may have had an inkling, but did not recognize it. We, all of us, are on that road to Emmaus with Jesus. We walk with him and do not see. Whether we are open to seeing Jesus on that road with us, is ultimately up to us.

You might wonder where a place where we may recognize Jesus in our lives? Where can I go, what can I do to notice what the risen Christ has in store for my life? How can I get heartburn? How about we start where all may recognize Jesus: Holy Communion.

Slide: It happened that...

It is no accident that Cleopas and his friend should finally see Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The meal that Jesus gives us as a sacrament is important, and it is apparent in this Gospel reading, that that is exactly what he is doing. He is giving these disciples of his himself. And, every time we share the meal of Holy Communion, we receive him, and we know him in the breaking of the bread.

This is why Holy Communion is so central to our faith and why we celebrate it in response to the Word we hear each Sunday. We recognize the risen Lord in the sharing of his body and blood. Every time we celebrate Holy Communion, we practice the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our response to that resurrection. We gather, we hear God's word, we eat the meal, and we go out into the world. This practice is what helps us to see Jesus.

Expressly, there are four actions that occur at Holy Communion, and you will notice that Jesus does the same in this scripture. The actions are, taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it. These four actions represent what God is doing. God first takes us as friends; then God blesses us with the life of Jesus. God then is broken on the cross for us and we are broken with him in his death, so that through Christ's resurrection, we may be given away for the Kingdom of God.

Experiencing this being given to God's Kingdom is the heartburn of which I speak. I have heard over and over again from many of you that it is the time of Holy Communion that you feel God is doing something in your life. It is the time we practice the resurrection in our lives. And, it is the time when we actually see Jesus right in front of us, in the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine.

After communion, we usually say a prayer. While as I really like the prayers we normally use, I love the following prayer that is usually used in Anglican liturgies but we will pray it today after communion. The prayer reminds me of how we see Jesus each time we celebrate Holy Communion:

“Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off, you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ’s body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope that you have set before us so we and all your children shall be free and the whole world live to praise your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Slide: Prescription for Heartburn

The risen Christ will walk with you in your journey. And, as a reminder, today, you may take that prescription with you. I have written you a script for heartburn. And the prescription is as follows according to today’s Gospel reading: As Christ meets us in the breaking of the bread, he is:

Taking us

Blessing us

Breaking us

And Giving us away to the world.

And, he will cajole you, prod you, and push you to be the disciple you are to be, until you do recognize him as the one who takes, blesses, breaks, and gives himself for your sake. Amen.