

Easter 3, April 23, 2023

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Theme: Open Eyes and Hearts on Fire

The best evangelists are newly baptized Christians or Christians who have recently returned to the fold. I was talking to one such man who had recently become Christian and he couldn't stop gushing about how wonderful Jesus is and how he didn't know how he had gone so far through life without having this joy. He also wanted to know what was wrong with so many other Christians. Why aren't they excited to be in the presence of Jesus? How can they have faith in Jesus and not be in Church every time the doors are opened? How can they be so jaded?

Well, I told him, sometimes people get beaten down by the world and begin to forget how exciting it is to be a member of the family of God. I also had to admit that, at the time, I had celebrated some 58 Easters, 30 of them as a pastor and I too struggled with losing the magic and wonder of the resurrection. Sometimes we find ourselves just going through the motions of our faith and doing our time without remembering why we do what we do.

Don't think that pastors and church workers are immune to that. We're some of the worst cases because we get so caught up in leading the worship and preparing the Bible studies and

consecrating the elements and playing the hymns and planning the events and leading the youth that we too forget the wonder of it all, and we find ourselves griping and complaining about the service we are offering to God. I once suggested to a Sunday School teacher that she needed to find a week day bible class to attend because obviously she was teaching the children when bible study for adults was going on. She told me that she got plenty of bible study in preparing her weekly lessons for the children.

So first off, how much of the Word of God is “plenty?” I don’t think we ever have “plenty” of the Word of God. Secondly, preparing to teach someone else about Jesus is not the same as listening to Jesus for yourself. I understand the temptation. There have been times that I have been so busy preparing sermons and bible studies that I too have forgot to listen to Jesus for myself. That is when the fire in my heart begins to die down. That is when my eyes become scripturally unfocussed.

In our Gospel today, we hear about two disciples of Jesus who had witnessed the events of the crucifixion and resurrection earlier that day. We don’t know much about them other than one was named Cleopas and they were witnesses. The Emmaus disciples were walking along the road talking about all the stuff that had happened but they were not listening for God’s Word. Had they

been focused on God's Word they would have remembered that everything that had happened in Jerusalem during Holy Week had been foretold by the prophets. That was when Jesus opened their eyes with His teaching and as he did so, their hearts burst into the flames of faith again and they became excited once more.

All it took for their faith to flame up what Jesus' Word and presence. That is exactly what we have here. He speaks to us today through His Word. And He is present, literally, physically with us through His body and blood. Feel your hearts begin to burn within you and get excited once more for Jesus. Cast off all the things that dampen your faith: the bills, the lawn, the household chores, worries about a job or school, and remember once more that Jesus is present here and now *with* you and *for* you. Feel Jesus set your heart aflame and let those flames spread all around you as you rejoice once more that He has died on the cross to set you free from this world of sin and all its worries. He rose from the dead to prove that you are no longer enslaved by the chains of this world. You are saved and you are free and that is absolutely exciting!

You might have been a Christian for a long, long time, 60, 70, even more than 80 years but when Jesus opens His Word to you, nothing is old hat. Nothing is business as usual and you will find yourself like those Emmaus disciples racing to others to tell them

of what Jesus has done. You will find yourself rejoicing in what He has done. You will be unable to even contain yourself from proclaiming His glorious work to anyone who will listen. The miracle of God's Holy Spirit allows us to shake off the jadedness of this world and retain the joy and exuberance of a new Christian.

Luther reminds us to remember our baptism the first thing every morning. Before your feet hit the floor, say to yourself, "I am a baptized child of God," and make the sign of the cross. When you remember your baptism, you remember also that you have been made new again! It is a brand-new day for you and you are a brand-new person. Everything is new just like for those disciples who ran back to Jerusalem from Emmaus and heard their brothers shouting, "The Lord has risen indeed!"

Whatever is weighing you down will lift. Whatever is causing you to stumble will vanish. It will change your life when you let go of everything but being a baptized child of God. When you stop seeking to make God congruent with your life or the world or your choices and just relax into being a baptized child of God for whom God will do with as He sees fit. Then your life will change. You will know that you are imperfect but forgiven. You are sinful but redeemed. You are the heir to paradise and your Lord has risen.