

The Taj Mahal in India is one of the most beautiful and costly monuments or tombs ever built – and its origin reveals a fascinating fact about the process of its construction. In 1629 the Indian ruler Shah Jahan ordered that a magnificent tomb be built as a memorial to his favorite wife who had suddenly died. The Shah placed his wife’s casket in the middle of the piece of land where the temple is now located, and construction of the memorial for her literally began around her remains. But several years into the construction, the Shah’s grief for his wife gave way to his passion for the project. One day while he was at the site of the construction, he reportedly stumbled over a wooden box, and he had some workers throw it out. It was months before he realized that the box he had thrown away was his wife’s casket. The original purpose for the memorial became lost in the details of its construction.

As we walk through the strains of our earthly struggles in this fallen world, the glorious new life we have been given in the risen Christ can just become just another ordinary wooden box lost the middle of the building project of everyday life. If we are not careful, over time, the zeal and the joy of our initial first love experience with Jesus will fade into the shadows of other passions. The same happens for many who claim Christ after celebrating the season of the resurrection. But our Christian faith is based on the resurrection. Jesus appeared to hundreds of people after he rose, and every time he did so something incredible happened. I pray something incredible would happen to all of us here today as we look at what happened in the lives of two broken-hearted disciples who met Jesus after his resurrection, and as a result, they were never the same again. As we study the process they went through, as we get a better view of the risen Jesus, perhaps we can get a better view of where we each are with the Lord in these days, so we would be changed again by the resurrection. The event we are looking at this morning, which is known as The Road to Emmaus, is a story worth repeating because what happened that day is at the very heart of the Gospel, which is – the living hope found only in the risen Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 the apostle Paul wrote: *“If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.”* On the day Jesus rose from the dead, that living hope was far from being established in the experience of the two people we read of this morning. Yet their hearts were dramatically changed they encountered the resurrected Jesus. In our text we see *how* our hearts are changed when we encounter the risen Christ.

First, we see that our hearts are changed when we have *a heart-breaking experience with the risen Christ*: *“That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?’ And they stood still, looking sad”* (Luke 24:13-17). Now Luke wrote these words in the context of Jesus’ crucifixion and death and burial, along with the discovery that the tomb he was buried in is now empty and the news that he might be alive. He tells us about two followers of Jesus who were talking about what had happened Jerusalem as they made their way *“to a village named Emmaus.”* We’re not given insight into exactly what they said to one another but most likely many of their words in English would probably have begun with the letter “D” - words like disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, despair and even death come to mind. All of these words would have summed up how these two men felt as a stranger who joined them on the road to Emmaus. Luke’s words today make it clear that they had left a dispirited and confused group of disciples back in Jerusalem, as Jesus’ arrest and torture and crucifixion was clearly still fresh in their hearts and minds. The man they had revered and loved and followed had now been horribly put to death by crucifixion, which was the cruellest, most painful, and shameful of all methods of execution. The victims were made a public spectacle, naked and exposed to the taunts of all who passed by. Only a week before, the disciples’ hopes had risen when the crowds had hailed Jesus as the Messiah, the deliverer from the oppressive Romans. Now he lay dead in a sealed tomb. Their hopes and dreams were dashed.

All those who had committed their lives to following Jesus were now without their beloved leader – and the reports that Christ’s tomb was now empty did nothing to lighten their heavy hearts nor alter their thinking. In fact, it only confused them even more. Their entire world had seemingly come apart. The two despondent disciples summed up their feelings and situation in verse 21: *“we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”* Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers it’s difficult to revive. Hopelessness is a disease of the human heart that is desperately hard to cure. When our hopes are dashed, despair sets in. When our expectations are not met, we become disillusioned. These two men had erected a wall of hopelessness around them, and they were trapped in their misery. Their hearts broken by everything that had just occurred, Luke tells us that *“they stood still, looking sad.”*

As these two made their weary way to Emmaus a stranger comes along side of them. Of course today we know that it was the risen Jesus, but for some reason they didn’t recognize him. In fact, Luke tells us *“their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”* What we are reading here is that it wasn’t by accident that they didn’t notice who Jesus was. Yes, they were depressed and too preoccupied with what had happened to see Jesus. But God could have opened their eyes; in fact, we know Jesus would do that that very thing in the evening. But at this point, He did not; He *“kept from recognizing him.”* By God’s sovereign hand for some unknown supreme purpose, they were not allowed to recognize Jesus. And neither do we. Visual appearances of Jesus ceased at his ascension. We have not been granted the honor of physically seeing the resurrected body of Christ. Probably wouldn’t recognize him if we did.

Just like these two on the road, we will have to make do with other people’s testimony that Jesus has risen from the dead. And just like them we also have to trust that the resurrection did happen and that Jesus actually did rise from the dead. On this side of the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus’ ascension we must trust, like those before us and those who will follow us - that God is truly God, and His Word is truth and that Jesus is God and he rose from the dead. That’s what our faith in Christ is all about. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that, *“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* Jesus himself said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29).

As they walked along, Jesus asked them, *“What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?”* And so they poured out their broken hearts to someone who seemed willing to listen. This is the heart of our Savior: listening with compassionate understanding in spite of our confusion and lack of faith. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* Our text reveals to us today when we are broken-hearted, Jesus loves us and listens to us with grace and mercy. Psalm 34:18 says: *“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”* Our hearts are changed when we have a *heart-breaking experience* with the risen Christ.

Second, we see that our hearts are changed when we have a *heart-filling experience* with the risen Christ: *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?’ And he said to them, ‘What things?’ And they said to him, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see’”* (Luke 24:18-27).

Here we read that as the two men walked along with Jesus, not knowing he was Jesus, Cleopas expresses shock and surprise at being asked what they were talking about with each other: *“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”* But in spite of the stunned amazement in the voice of Cleopas, Jesus patiently continued to ask them to describe the things they were talking about, *“concerning Jesus of Nazareth.”* They then went on to talk about who Jesus was, and about the events and of their experiences of the last few days – and of the reality that now Jesus had been crucified, and he had died. The cross had taken Jesus from them, and even though Jesus stood before them risen and alive, their eyes could not see Jesus and their hearts could not make sense out of what happened because they stood in the shadow of the cross of the *past*.

This is also still one of our greater struggles of our Christian faith. Jesus did not come to earth and sacrifice his life on a cross so we might live in the *past*. He gave up his life so we could have a new life. Just before Jesus’ last breath on Calvary he said: *“It is finished”* (John 19:30) and his spoken word for us today is his declaration in Revelation 21:5: *“Behold, I am making all things new!”* - and sadly most people discount the rest of his words in this verse where Jesus said: *“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”* One of the greatest barriers to the witness of our faith in Jesus Christ is that most of our testimonies are focused on our *past*. But Jesus emphasized that our faith in him is to be about about the present by being *living* witnesses (Matt. 5:15; 1 Peter 2:12). In Matthew 7:20 he said: *“You will recognize them by their fruits.”* The problem with living in the *past* is that we miss out on what Christ is doing in the *present*. What matters in life is what Jesus is doing in our lives *right now*. When our hearts and minds are in the *past* we end up being just like these two men on the way to Emmaus – unable to recognize Jesus when he is standing right beside us. 1 Corinthians 5:17 says: *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* Jesus calls us to the new life he died for in the *present* which is preparation for the glorious new life he promises in the *future*.

Our text tell us this morning we must recognize that regardless of our situations or circumstances Jesus is with us in the present. He’s the unseen stranger walking with us, listening to us and, if we are willing to hear and to listen to his voice, he is filling our hearts and lives with God’s Word. As the two disciples spoke of what happened on the cross, Jesus took hold of their confusion and sorrow and gave them a *heart-changing* experience by revealing himself to be God and Savior in the Scriptures. *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”* The key word here is *“all”*. Too often we become so selective in the things we want to believe, that we no longer know what the Word of God’s truth is. We rarely believe *“all”* that God says. We see this in Jesus’ day. The Jews misunderstanding of Jesus was not because they hadn’t read the prophets of the Old Testament, but rather because they’d read the Scriptures *selectively*, concentrating on those parts that spoke of a triumphant Messiah who would come as a victorious king. The passages that spoke of a suffering servant didn’t fit in with their expectation of the Messiah. And so as Jesus walked along with these two men towards Emmaus he filled their hearts with the truth from the Scriptures about who he truly was.

Imagine being taught by Jesus himself the history of the Old Testament; God Himself explaining the types, shadows and symbols of God for His people. The Creator of the world telling the story of the creation and the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden and the first promise of the Messiah. The Lord of the Universe sharing the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and of the angel of death and life through the blood of the Passover lamb. Picture Jesus interpreting the words of the prophets and prophecies over the centuries - of his ultimate triumph over death, proving that he was indeed the Son of God, Redeemer, Deliverer - the Messiah. Jesus’ purpose in filling these two men with God’s Word as they made their way to Emmaus was to *help them make sense of the cross* – because the cross is not only a hard concept to understand, it’s also a difficult thing to accept. When you truly understand the cross of Christ your heart will be dramatically *changed*.

As Jesus *“interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”* he revealed to them that the cross was creative act of God’s love– and that by a single, violent, sacrificial act of God’s mercy and grace God the Father gave the life of His only begotten Son on a bloody cross so that sin saturated human beings like ourselves might be forgiven and cleansed and restored back to God. When that truth penetrates the depths of our hearts, we will be forever *changed* and made brand new. Again - *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* Our hearts will be dramatically changed when we are *filled with the truth of God’s Word* about the risen Christ.

Third, we see that our hearts are changed when we have a *heart-burning experience with the risen Christ*: *“So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread”* (Luke 24:28-35). And so as the two men walked along the road, they are absorbed in a conversation with Jesus, whom they do not recognize. I would guess that the two-hour journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus must have seemed like five minutes. We’re told here that as they approached Emmaus, Jesus *“acted as if he were going farther”* but Cleopas and his companion invited Jesus to stay with them, for something within their *hearts* had been changed by a Savior whom they did not see: *“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”*

Now the *“heart burn”* we are reading about here is not the kind of *heartburn* we can get when we eat food that doesn’t agree with us. This is a kind of *heart-burn* deep within our hearts that is ignited and flames up within our souls when we see the fullness of God in and through Jesus Christ – which causes a burning away of everything that keeps us from seeing and hearing and knowing and trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Imagine the two men at that moment, stunned with amazement, asking each other, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”* Their broken-hearted, despair-laded, dispirited world had come together again. God’s truth had been revealed. God’s hope had returned. God had healed and changed and transformed their hearts. Their hearts *“burned”* with the reality that Jesus had given his life on a cross for the forgiveness of their sins. And now he had risen from the dead - so that they might be restored back to God so they could joyfully know a new life in the fullness of God’s mercy, forgiveness, grace and love.

This is how we come to faith in Jesus Christ. God, through Jesus Christ, comes along side of us when we are broken-hearted and he speaks into our lives - and changes our hearts with his truth and his love and his mercy and his grace – which then opens the eyes in our heads and in our hearts to the truth of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ – which causes us to invite Jesus to come into and take over our hearts and lives. It’s only later that we come to understand that the *burning* within our own hearts was a result of God’s sovereign love-saturated, grace-filled, most merciful intervention into the distracted, preoccupied, dispirited, self-oriented confusion of our everyday hearts and lives. The heart-burning encounter with the risen Christ is something that we all need. We all need the heart-burning experience of surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ when the Spirit of God reveals to us that we are lost without him. And we all continue to need the heart-burning experience by inviting the Holy Spirit to enter in and burn away the things in our hearts that keep us from God, and heal our hearts that continue to be broken by sin - as the Holy Spirit convicts and fills our hearts with the truth of His Word in our daily walk with Jesus. Where are you in your heart with Jesus this morning?

If you are here today and have not yet received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I pray you would open your heart and surrender your life to Jesus – for he has sacrificed his life on a cross for you, so you might know forgiveness and healing and hope and joy and new life in this life and eternal life after this life - through a restored relationship with God by the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. In John 6:35 Jesus said: “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*” Jesus is the fulfillment of the deepest yearnings of our souls. He is the end of our quest for satisfaction in a world that is dominated by the alluring pleasures of sin. John 4:14 he said: “*Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*” Jesus is the fullness that will satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts. In John 7:37–38 Jesus declared: “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’*” When we put our faith in the risen Christ, he becomes in us an inexhaustible fountain of pleasure, contentment and gratification in this life and in the life that will last forever in heaven.

This is also the *heart-burn* we called to as the body of Christ, the church – because God’s Word today tells us that when we truly encounter the living God as He is in Jesus Christ, our hearts and lives will be changed forever. You cannot have a heart experience with the risen Christ and not be immediately and eternally changed from that moment on. Once you meet the risen Christ on the road of life, he will listen to you and talk with you and open the truth of His Word and fill your heart - and you will walk away from that experience with a heart that will burn for him forever. C. S. Lewis once wrote: “If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” When our hearts are truly changed by a *heart-breaking, heart-filling heart-burning experience* with the risen Christ – we will not find any pleasure or fulfillment or contentment or satisfaction in anything or anyone other than Jesus.

In *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* Jim Cymbala writes: “If the people in our churches don't have an appetite for God, what does it matter how many are attending the services? How would that impress God? Can you imagine the angels saying, ‘Oh, your pews! We can't believe how beautiful they are! We've been talking about them for years in heaven. Your sanctuary lighting—it's so clever. The way you have the steps coming up to the pulpit—it's wonderful.’ I don't think so. If we don't want to experience God's closeness here on earth, why would we want to go to heaven anyway? God is the center of everything there. If we don't enjoy being in His presence here and now, then heaven would not be heaven for us. Why would He send anyone there who doesn't long for Him passionately here on earth?” God is to be the greatest burning passion of our hearts - and the only way to dispossess our hearts of the lesser affections is to fill our hearts with the greatest affection of risen Jesus Christ. What does that look like in church? Well, the preacher Devon Huss says a church that has a burning passion for God is a church where “discouraged folks cheer up, dishonest folks fess up, sour folks sweeten up, closed folk open up, gossipers shut up, conflicted folks make up, sleeping folks wake up, lukewarm folk fire up, dry bones shake up, and pew potatoes stand up - because the name of Jesus is being lifted up!”

God’s Word tells us today that when Jesus intrudes into our lives and intervenes in our thoughts and sends conviction into our spirits, it is for the purpose of *changing us* - and in the process He reveals things that are hidden and uncomfortable as He encroaches deeply into our conscience, and invades the private areas of our hearts, souls and lives. Jesus has risen from the dead! And today he is walking with us, listening to us and, if we are willing to hear his voice and willing to listen to his voice, speaking God’s truth into our lives. I pray today you would welcome his initiative and allow God to change your heart and your affections so you might eat of the bread of life and never hunger; and drink of the living water and never thirst; and live with and for the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ forever!

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3-9*

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