

“Serious Heart Burn”

Encountering Christ, part 1

Luke 24:13-35

Jim Ozier notes in his book, *The Changeover Zone*, the three hardest things in the world are: (1) to climb a fence leaning toward you; (2) to kiss someone leaning away from you; and (3) to preach your first sermon in a new church.¹

Good morning, friends. I am so glad you are here, in person and online, to worship Jesus together. Take a look around you. Make eye contact with someone. I want you to know, you are in the right place this morning. You are not here by accident. The people around you love you, appreciate you, and are here to worship God with you.

If you came here this morning, hoping to find perfection, I am sorry to disappoint you. The church is full of imperfect people. However, we serve a perfect God, and we believe in forgiveness and redemption, because we all believe we have room to grow in our lives. We are all in this together.

As we pray, I invite you to place your hands in front of you, palms up, ready to receive what God has for you today. Let us pray.

Lord, we are ready to listen to you and your word. We are simply grateful for the opportunity to worship you. We love you, Jesus. Reveal yourself to us this morning. Transform our lives, as we give you all the honor and praise. Amen.

Have you ever felt the need to go for a walk outside to clear your thoughts? I have discovered that jogging and cross-country skiing are good times to practice preaching. The forest is an excellent listener. The trees never contradict me. One time as I was skiing and practicing my message, I was bold, loud, creative,

¹ Jim Ozier and Jim Griffith, *The Changeover Zone* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2016), 75.

funny...and completely by myself. Or so I thought. I was emphatically driving home my point, when not one, not two, but a whole family of skiers crested the hill in front of me. They likely had no idea why I was shouting. So I just stopped mid-sentence, nodded, and kept skiing in the other direction.

Taking a walk can really help you clear your mind, especially when you are anxious. You can talk things over, by yourself, or with someone else. You can listen to your heart and practice contemplative silence, and return refreshed and ready to face your challenges.

I once participated in the “Walk to Emmaus,” a three-day retreat based on the scripture we read today. During the Emmaus Walk, you spend the first evening in complete silence. Even in the bathroom, brushing your teeth or waiting for a toilet, you don’t speak a word to anyone. At first, it was really weird. Yet later, we realized what a gift we had been given. It was a relief the next morning to talk to others again, to let the flow of thoughts and words resume.

Our problem is that sometimes we get so lost within our own thoughts that we don’t even see or hear what is going on around us. I’ll let you in on a little secret: If you want a guy to do something for you, you have to ask him more than once. There is an excellent chance he literally didn’t hear you the first time.

When our thoughts overwhelm us, we need feel the need to get away from it all. So it was for these two men on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were lost in their own thoughts, and they certainly were not expecting Jesus to show up, let alone have a life-changing, heart-burning encounter with him.

These two disciples were not having a good day. They definitely needed to get outside. They might have been going back home to Galilee. Or maybe they wanted to get out of Jerusalem and speak more freely, without the fear of who

might overhear them. As they walked the open road, they discussed what they had seen and heard.

These two men knew Jesus, yet they were very confused. On Good Friday, they saw Jesus die on the cross, and just that Sunday morning, they heard the women report that the tomb was empty. It must have seemed so crazy, so amazing and so unbelievable, that they needed to go for a walk.

In the midst of their wonderings, maybe even arguments, Jesus showed up. Scripture says they were kept from recognizing Jesus, even though Jesus obviously knew who they were. I think these men were so sad and downcast, they couldn't recognize Jesus. They were completely lost in their thoughts. They had lost hope.

Jesus got their attention with a question. “What are you talking about?” The disciples were almost biting sarcasm. “Are you a stranger? Don't you know?” Jesus maintained his ignorance. “What things?” See, Jesus knew, you have to ask the question twice! Jesus was a good counselor. He wanted them to talk. He wanted them to speak aloud the worries on their hearts. Jesus doesn't want us to pretend. He doesn't want us to hide how we feel. Jesus loves our honesty. Jesus listened first, then he spoke.

So these men opened up their hearts to him. They revealed their sorrow, their confusion, their disappointment. Here it was the third day, the day they might possibly expect to see Jesus again, but they didn't. Even though they heard the women's report, they didn't believe it. They were stuck.

What was missing? They knew what Jesus had taught them. Why didn't they expect the resurrection? Here's what I think. They were missing Jesus himself. His presence. It seems that they were more fixated on the fact that

Jesus had died than they were about the stories bubbling up. Their own expectations were not met. That’s why they were sad. It wasn’t the resurrection stories that brought them down, but the crucifixion in the first place. They just couldn’t believe that Jesus had died. They needed help. And Jesus gave it to them. Luke 24:27 says, “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” (NIV)

Have you ever had a time when you were so wrapped up in grief, anxiety, or stress, that you lost all hope? Maybe this time is difficult for you. Certainly, we face extreme challenges in this pandemic. You are walking through another pastoral transition; my family is learning to embrace a new community and congregation. By the way, I know that the previous pastors have done excellent ministry here. I am grateful for the way that Pastor Chuck and others have blessed you and me by their hard work. Yet this time give us a choice: where will our focus be? On the past? On ourselves and our loss? Or on our future hope?

I often am amazed at the contrast in religious art between the crucifixion and the resurrection. Many beautiful pieces of art give glory to God and the work of redemption. Yet, given the choice, I’d rather see a picture of the empty cross or the empty tomb. When Jesus said, “It is finished,” he meant it. (John 19:30) As disciples of the risen Jesus Christ, we are a people of the resurrection. We are a people who worship Jesus who is ALIVE and is with us. That is our hope.

As Jesus spoke to the hearts of these two disciples, so he speaks to us now. Our hearts can also burn, in a good way. Our passion for Jesus can increase. We can have tears, hope, and even some laughter. We can have that “aha” moment. Christ suffered for us! Christ rose again for us!

I love Jesus’ sense of humor. The passage says that Jesus pretended like he was going on to the next town. Really, was he just going to say, “Well, nice talking to you two. I’m going on ahead to the next motel”? After the men invited him in for a meal, Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and passed it around the table. I can just picture the faces of the men. As recognition dawned on them, they realized the truth. It was Jesus! He was alive! And then...he disappeared from their sight. Seriously, I think Jesus was teasing them.

Jesus changed these men dramatically. They were suddenly filled with hope. They looked at each other and uttered those famous words, “Weren’t our hearts burning as he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?” Emboldened by their encounter with Christ, they got back on the very same road they warned Jesus NOT to travel, and ran back to Jerusalem. They had to tell someone what they just experienced. In Jerusalem, they found the disciples and shared their joy with them.

An encounter with Jesus should change us the same way. When we encounter the risen Christ, our hearts should burn. Our attitudes should change. Our response to the world should be different.

Before meeting Christ, these men were afraid. Darkness was coming. It was dangerous to be out on the road. But after they saw and recognized Christ, even though he disappeared from their eyes, they were empowered, transformed. They ran seven miles back to Jerusalem, the very spot of their fear and regret, and they changed the story for everyone. They brought encouragement, and they received encouragement.

What is the point of following Jesus? Two words: Life transformation. Do we truly believe this incredible story, the gospel? God loves us, formed us for a

relationship, and redeemed us from all of our brokenness and sin by sending his own Son to die for us. Then Jesus rose again, inviting us to eternal life....That’s the gospel. If we believe all that, something about us should be different. Very different. Heart burning-ly different.

The reason I stand before you today is because Christ has changed my life. I want my heart to burn for him. I want my walk to encourage others. Am I going to mess up? Yes. Again and again. But the hope of the resurrection has changed me, and the power of the Holy Spirit is going to keep working in my life, as long as I continue to say yes to Jesus.

Where does that leave us? First of all, we need to embrace the crucifixion without being morbid. The cross shows us the depth of the sacrifice, the love that Jesus the Son of God, has for us. Jesus really died to save us. We have to embrace that fact.

And then we have to let go. We can’t stay at the crucifixion forever. That’s why these men were lost. They were stuck at the cross. It took a powerful encounter with the risen Jesus himself to get them back on the right path. It was a serious heart burn, and it was caused by the Son of God himself, and it felt better than anything they had ever experienced before.

Encountering Christ on the road changed these two men. We can expect the same change in our lives when we seek Jesus and find him. These men were able to talk about the deepest, darkest moments of their lives with Jesus. Jesus wants to do the same for us. We recognize Christ in our lives and in our congregation, even in the breaking of bread. His presence is among us. I know the song says, “I will cling to the old rugged cross,” but really, we cling to the hope

that the empty cross represents. The tomb is still empty. We don't grieve Jesus' death any more. We have victory instead.

Where are you in your walk with Christ? Can you see him? Or are you blinded by something, like grief or shame? Are you even looking to see him? Open the eyes of your heart. Realize that Jesus is there with you. He is walking with you. And seek others who will talk about these things with you.

The first thing I did after the moving truck arrived is go for a jog in our new neighborhood. It was exciting to see this place for the first time and meet my neighbors. I dream about what the Holy Spirit will do among all of us together. Church, we are companions on a journey, and others are waiting to hear our story. Let's go outside and walk with our risen Lord.

Memory verse

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” – Luke 24:32 (NIV)

Reflection questions

1. Describe a time when you were so wrapped up in your own thoughts that you missed something significant.
2. Luke 24:16 says the two disciples were “kept from recognizing” Jesus. Why do you think this happened? Does God hide from people?
3. If you could have a face-to-face conversation with Jesus, what would you ask him?
4. Describe a time in your life when your heart “burned within you.”
5. How can you “open your eyes and recognize Christ” in your life?

6. How can you help someone else encounter Christ?