



Road to Emmaus by John McNaughton

Last week in Acts, you were in the upper room with the doubting Thomas. Let me ask you, if you had been Jesus there in the upper room when Thomas refused to believe, what would your reaction have been? Well, if I'd been Jesus, and had just gone through the humiliation of Maundy Thursday, the suffering of the Via Dolorosa, the agony of the Cross, and those nights spent locked away in that tomb – if after all of that I came back to my friends and one of them had the audacity, the nerve to say, “No way! I'm not believing this poppycock, not until I can see it with my own eyes, and touch it with my own hands.” Well, if I'd been Jesus, at that moment,

my response would have been, “Thomas, do you know what you can do with your doubts? Would you like me to tell you exactly where you can put that doubt of yours, Thomas?” ☺ But Jesus doesn't say that, does he? Because Jesus is absolutely determined that even Thomas with all his doubts is going to have a change of heart.

The focus today is on a change of heart. The account from Acts says that the people listening to Peter were cut to the heart about the part they played in crucifying Jesus (see Acts 2:36).. There should be a change of heart, if we have truly accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. And that change of heart should be evident for all the world to see.

When you have your chest opened for any form of open-heart surgery, they tie your rib cage back together with binding wire. And the more deeply they have to cut along your sternum, the more wire they have to use. So when Donna and I flew back from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota in February of 2014 after they sawed my chest open and shaved off one-half of my inner heart-wall, as I passed through the security checkpoint at the airport, I was watching the attendant who was looking at the monitor. When I stepped underneath the x-ray machine, the TSA official's eyes got real wide. I mean, when the machine passed over my chest, I must have lit-up that puppy like a Christmas tree! So, my own 'change of heart' was pretty dad-gum evident!

That's the way it must have been for those 3,000 souls who were added to the church that first Day of Pentecost (See Acts2:41) In Acts 2, verse 38, Peter tells them to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” Scholars have observed that in verse 38, there is no requirement to make a public confession of faith.¹ I believe the reason for this is that the crowd gathered around the Apostle Peter that day were so obviously ecstatic about becoming a follower of The Way, that any verbal profession was insignificant. They had in their hearts already thrown themselves into the arms of the Anointed One.

The Psalmist proclaims his heart-felt dry about his inability to truly repay all the good things received at The Lord's hand (see Ps.116:10). The epistle this morning talks about a new kind of love in which the Christian is able to love deeply from the heart (see 1Pet.1:22). In the account from Luke, the disciples on the road to Emmaus talked about the way their hearts burned when they listened to the voice of The Lord (see Lk.24:32). Evidently, there is something that has to happen to the heart when we come to recognize the Son of God. There should be a change of heart, if we have truly accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. And that change of heart should be evident for all the world to see. At least, that's the way it should be for you and me, too. When you truly become a follower of Jesus Christ, that comes with some fairly dramatic and deeply felt changes in your life. And this change of heart should be something that the entire world can witness.

¹ However, this does NOT absolve us from Paul's instructions in Romans 10:9-10 that: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

And, no way should this kind of transformation be a source of embarrassment! It needs to be shared, and shown, even shouted from the rooftops. Because the old has gone and the new has come. And we are indeed a new creation (see 2Cor.5:16-18).

But something was needed that first Day of Pentecost to mark once and for all time this commitment to Jesus. And here we come to the real meaning of the Sacraments. Because you and I need to do something public and dramatic to demonstrate our acceptance of Jesus' Lordship. And the Gospel passage for today continues this theme of the central place for the other Biblical Sacrament which you and I will practice in just a few minutes, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Because if in that first Pentecost Sunday we see the enactment of the Sacrament of Christian Baptism, the Gospel brings us to Eucharist.

During that journey along the road to Emmaus, it was in the breaking of the bread that their eyes were opened to the true identify of Jesus (See Lk.24:29-30). That means that a real Sacrament requires real revelation and understanding of just what we are doing. Coming to this place and to these rails on Sunday morning doesn't amount to a hill-of-beans until we reach a real, deep, life-changing understanding of what it truly means to kneel here and accept the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. You can't just go through the motions if you actually expect this to make a difference in your life. And some... most... almost all of that difference involves being broken.

Why did Jesus insist on breaking the bread with his 12 closest friends at the Last Supper? (See Mt.26:26; Mk.14:22; Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24) And why did The Lord orchestrate this Gospel passage from Luke that we read this morning – why did Jesus use the breaking of bread as the means to make himself known to his disciples at that dinner table in Emmaus? (See Lk.24:30-31) Because in order to be truly His, we must also be truly broken. Our wild rebellious spirits must be broken to the loving will of God. Our hearts must be broken by the realization of the immensity of His sacrifice for you and me. Only then, after the breaking, can our hearts be finally opened to receive him and His Holy Spirit. Only then, after the breaking, can we truly come to the blessing of knowing the joy of the Lord.

Acts 2 instructs those who would be believers to be Baptized **in the name of the Lord**. (See Acts2:38) 1st Peter this morning says that one attribute for those who call upon **the name of the Lord** is a meaningful reverence and awe² for God's sovereignty, and the sacrifice of the Son's precious blood. (See 1Pet.1:17-19) . Psalm 116 defines those who truly call upon **the name of the Lord** (v.17) as those who pay their vows to the Lord in the presence of his people." (vv.14,18) This is the real value of committed pledging and public tithing. Because the truth is, by not being faithful in offering some form of earthly sacrifice, we cheapen the heavenly sacrifice Jesus has paid for us. Jesus sacrificed his precious blood for us, and that was truly a heavenly sacrifice destined to pay our fares to a heavenly Kingdom. You and I can't make that kind of sacrifice, for we live in this world. But we are called upon to make what sacrifice we can. The follower of Jesus must be willing to give up something for the call of God upon his life. The value of anything is found in its cost. And if it costs you nothing to be in the fellowship of believers, then how can that fellowship be worth anything to you?.

At that dinner table in Emmaus, we read that Jesus disappeared from their living sight, once the Disciples had come to recognize him (see Lk.24:31). But that was OK. Jesus vanished from their earthly presence, but that didn't stop these people from racing back to their community to shout aloud from the rooftops that Jesus is alive and Lord of all. Because they have been given the hope that never disappoints. They have seen The Lord, their hearts have been changed, and they know, they absolutely KNOW that they will be His for evermore.

That's the way it should be for us to, if we have that hope that defies human sight and earthly understanding. Our hearts should burn within us too with that hope which never dies. Because that's what happens you see, when we can truly say, "Alleluia! Christ is risen." JWB+ 4/27/17

² The use of *phobos* is not our modern concept of "fear." The use here is in the same vein of Acts 9:31 and Rom.13:7.