

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

Eyes Opened

Luke 24.25-32, 44-48

April 12, 2020 (Easter)

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.²⁸ And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther.²⁹ But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them.³⁰ When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.³² They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things.

Going all the way back to late January, we've been watching Jesus Christ WALKING with and WORKING with these twelve young men known as the Twelve Disciples. We've said that He is the world's greatest educator. AND in many ways He piles up, in their minds and hearts, their intellect and their motives/desires – He piles up wood... that never really caught fire until now – after He rises from the dead.

What I just read are two post-resurrection appearances of Christ. In these two accounts, Jesus Christ, now risen from the dead, continues to shepherd and help and train His disciples. Both episodes include meals – a kind of spiritual meal AND a physical meal.

AND both scenes lead to an eye opening. The wood the Rabbi has piled up around their hearts and minds – that wood had now dried up under the scorching heat of doubt, disappointment, denial and defeat. That dried, dead wood, the doctrine, the Disciple had taught and shown them had become dry truth but it will now be kindled into a living fire that is still ablaze.

The way Jesus Christ deals with the disciples on the road and in Jerusalem is EXEMPLARY, it's a kind of pattern that's been and continues to be repeated wherever a person comes to believe in

Christ (converted) AND in the lives OF the converted, believers who are growing, whose hearts are kindled and rekindled again and again.

The original pattern/example we just read were both miraculous and extraordinary and the repetition of the pattern is most often more ordinary (may be dramatic OR even unnoticed) but UNDERSTANDING the pattern can be a big help to people initially considering Christ AND this understanding can help US who do believe as we continue to walk with Christ and as we spiritually help others (like our children, parents, friends and co-workers). Let's look at:

- 1) Two Episodes About an Eye Opening (re-kindling)
- 2) What to KNOW and EXPECT- how to USE this truth on ourselves and to help others

In the first paragraph, these two disciples (some have suggested a husband/wife or father/son) two followers of Jesus are leaving Jerusalem and this immense international festival (Passover) that had ended so tragically for a suburb called Emmaus.

Maybe the road was crowded and they're discussing what everyone is discussing – the only thing ANYONE is talking about because it's on ALL the news channels and print media and radio and internet newsfeeds and that is the CORONA VIRUS – no, it's what happened to this Man, Jesus of Nazareth during the feast of Passover. And they, being followers of this Jesus, are devastated and emotionally shattered because they THOUGHT Jesus was the long-awaited Redeemer...but they were wrong because He's dead.

Then the risen Jesus Christ joins them on the seven-mile walk but they don't recognize Him (maybe because they're so devastated and engrossed in conversation) and the unrecognized Jesus asks, "Hey, whatcha talking about?" and they're shocked! "What? You haven't heard of the Corona Virus – it's all anyone is talking about?!" (It would've been like that!) "You know the things about Jesus of Nazareth!"

"What things?" says the unrecognized risen Man.

So, in their broken-hearted, disappointed, preoccupied way they tell this simpleton the whole story: they thought He was the Messiah, but they crucified Him (no one saw THAT coming!) and it's been three days and some women amazed us by saying that He was alive... and the tomb is empty!"

And Jesus says (as our reading starts) "You simpletons! (lit- "non-thinking/naïve") and slow of heart to believe all the Prophets spoke. Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer/die and THEN enter into His glory?"

Then Jesus gives them the whole plan, the theory, the facts or teaching or doctrine of the WHOLE HEBREW BIBLE. He showed them that they'd missed the main idea of the Scriptures they'd studied since childhood: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CHRIST – the Scriptures tell of Him,

symbolically represent Him, predict Him with shadows and whispers. The doing and dying of the Messiah is what the Hebrew Bible is about – IT'S the main idea. How did you miss it?"

Then the unrecognized Visitor indicates that He'll keep going on the way (Augustin said "They thought they were walking ON the way – really they were walking WITH the Way") It was a little diagnostic test Jesus uses to see if they wanted more... AND THEY DO!

So they invite Him to dinner and (maybe) ask Him to say the prayer: "He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them." There was a standard Hebrew prayer Jesus would have prayed; "Blessed are You LORD God, King of the world who brings forth bread from the earth."

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him." Maybe they saw His hands (those hands) and the nail marks and realized He IS the Bread of Life come forth from the earth – He is both Guest and Host!

Then He was gone. But they were convinced! The wood piled around their hearts and minds that had dried out in the withering heat of disappointment and doubt – but now the wood caught fire! They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

And they ran back to Jerusalem to spread the fire – tell the disciples! And late that night while they're telling their story – Jesus Christ shows up. He shows Himself to the Eleven and others.

The disciples were afraid. They thought it was a ghost. And He proves to them that He's NOT a ghost. "See My hands and feet? Touch Me... It's Me!" He asks for food and He ate it – ghosts can't do that!

And then, after giving them this physical evidence He does what He did for the couple on the Emmaus Road – He gives them the theory, the doctrine, the way the whole Hebrew Bible (Genesis-Malachi) points to Him – to His death and resurrection. And a kindling takes place. Their souls are aflame. Eyes opened!

And then He takes THEM on a walk to Bethany and their hearts were filled "with great joy" (52) and were NOT afraid but bold – in the temple daily praising God! The pile of dry wood explodes into fire.

Notice some of the normative elements here that every Christian experiences in LATER EYE-OPENINGS right to this very day. First, there's some sense of deep need that dries out the soul and makes it parched, dry, thirsty, troubled, disappointed, guilty, afraid, regretful – maybe a sense of personal failure and doubt, guilt, condemnation. C.S. Lewis called it a desire for something OUTSIDE of this world.

Russell Brand the British comedian and actor – who is NOT a Christian, to my knowledge – but he shocked the whole Hollywood establishment a few years back when he joined the Recovery Movement and said that most of the people he knew were addicted to one thing or another. He said his turn-around started with an eye-opening. “I was awakened to the impossibility of happiness based on my previous worldview: I am the center of the world and that what I want is important. He felt this dryness – let’s see where it’ll take him.

But Jesus Christ listens and diagnoses where His disciples ARE. And we should too. We should learn to hear our own souls – like the Psalms “Why are you downcast, O my soul?” What are my emotions telling me about what’s going on in my soul?

And we should learn to patiently listen to what others are saying to us. Jesus gave the spiritual food first to the disciples on the road and did it the other way around with the other group. He was evidently responding to their different needs and conditions.

And is it possible that the Master Teacher, in taking this varied approach, is alerting US to the fact that a one-size-fits-all method of spiritual formation is neither effective nor loving nor wise?

The message is the same – and that’s the thing that on Easter we don’t want to miss. Jesus Christ rose from the dead – physically. And if that’s true it changes everything. YOU have to face that and I have to face it and it’s the best news there could be.

The Big Idea here is that all the history of the Jewish people, all their Scriptures from Genesis to Malachi all points to Jesus Christ – He is the author of the Story, the Main Character and the Big Idea.

He is the Last Adam. He is the Seed of the Woman who crushes the serpent’s head. His is the blood that speaks louder and better than the blood of Abel – Abel’s blood cries “Justice!” – His blood the blood of Jesus Christ cries, “Mercy!” and all the way through the whole Bible – He is the Ark that carries us through the waters of judgment; He is the Son, who was NOT spared the way Abraham’s son (Isaac) was spared... He is the Better Jacob, the Better Joseph, the foreigner who came from a distant place to redeem His family like Ruth and Boaz and on and on.

This was not a flash in the pan religious fanatic – He is the Savior of the world promised from the beginning – saving the world by an atoning death and a victorious resurrection – and it happened just as the ancient Scriptures said it would.

But the subordinate message here – that we shouldn't miss is that Jesus Christ is the Kindler of souls and we are His witnesses. He will use us in the lives of our children and the people in our lives (by His design) to sensitively help them (like midwives – to mix metaphors) to birth people and to help newborns in the Kingdom. We are His witnesses.

In my own conversion – I was so broken, both physically and spiritually. I was so weighed down by sin and shame and fear that I needed the theory of the Gospel. My own dad was there to tell me the parable of the Prodigal Son and it kindled a fire that never went out – to see logically and imaginatively that God wanted me... not to destroy/punish me but to bring me into the House of Joy.

Several months later, I met a cult member – a former coworker who really rattled my faith and God met me with the logic and teaching of the Scripture on a deeper level. I had to be able to see in the Bible that Jesus Christ was indeed God incarnate.

See we have the message and we NEED the message but the approach is different according to our own emotional/spiritual/intellectual state. We follow Jesus Christ, the one who piles the wood and then knows how to kindle it.

And how really helpful this can be as we deal with our own souls – to simply ask, “Lord, what am I not getting here? Help me diagnose what’s happening inside me and to see how to apply the Good News again – rekindle the truth that has become dry.”

My need (dryness) may be the very thing that sends me to the Eye Opener – the Re-Kindler of dusty/dry souls.

And even in helping our kids spiritually – we pile up the wood: we teach them grace and truth – grace and truth – grace and truth ... and then we listen; we watch; we ask searching questions. We see if they want more and in some dry and thirsty moment God might use us as the witness that helps all that wood to ignite.

Maybe, you're IN that really thirsty, needy, doubting and despairing place and you need someone to listen and help YOU to see how the Good News of the Resurrected Man – the King of a New Creation – can liberate you... Email us and set up a time to pray over the phone. Who knows what God will do to ignite our dry souls?