

Third Sunday of Easter

23.04.2017
By Alex Wimberly

Introduction

The revealed and risen Jesus gets us to reconsider all we've seen, and sets a fire in our hearts.

Text

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over 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 took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed 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 they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same

hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Comment

Seeing and not seeing fascinate us in this passage. The eyes of the two disciples 'were kept from recognising' Jesus; but later, in the breaking of bread, 'their eyes were opened, and they recognised him.' Although the two consider their companion ignorant for not knowing all the things that had recently taken place, it is Jesus who illuminates their experience in the light of his death and resurrection. As soon as they realise who is standing in front of them, Jesus vanishes 'from their sight.'

Looking back on their encounter with the risen Jesus, the disciples reassess what happened: 'were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking?' Everything that came before is now seen in the knowledge of Jesus' resurrection – including their recent conversation with this supposed stranger.

As we continue along our current path, everything we see is being re-examined in the reality of a pandemic. What seemed normal before is being reassessed in the light of a world that has had to stop and address a global crisis. Inequalities we ignored are now revealed as inexcusable. Healthcare and social services we took for granted are now recognised as invaluable. Workers who never before captured our collective attention are now rightly seen as essential. And when this present crisis vanishes from our sight, we will not be able to unsee the conflicted realities that are now laid bare.

Response

As a response to this familiar but strangely urgent story, we can reconsider what the disciples meant when they said their hearts were 'burning within' them while Jesus spoke to them – and why they went back to Jerusalem with such urgency.

We can read this phrase as indicating a strange warmth, a pleasant and cosy reassurance that managed to settle the nerves of a frightened duo still trying to make sense of their trauma; as a flickering internal glow that motivated them to share heart-warming news with their friends.

But in our own context, a new burning in our hearts not only comforts us with the reassurance of Jesus' resurrection; it provides this pandemic's glaring illumination on what has been true for too long: inequality, injustice, and inaction. Having our eyes opened, we see more clearly the persistence of societal and personal conflicts that cause real harm. As we re-examine everything that has come before in the light of this global crisis, we too will want to acknowledge things now evident – both the good and the bad – and hurry back to address the systemic problems we kept ourselves from seeing.

Prayer

Risen and revealing God,
you walked with us for a long time
before we knew who you truly were.
We talked about this world
as if we were the ones who saw it clearly.
Now that we more fully recognise

your continued presence with us,
give us eyes to see the beauty
that surrounds us,
as well as the problems we have too long ignored.
And may our hearts then burn
with your illuminating and catalysing fire
that we might see the world that you envision.
Amen.

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: Inner Journey