

“How shall we repay the Lord for all
the good things God has done?” AMEN!

Most of us have heard it said
that “All politics is local.”

It refers to the politician being elected
when they address the local issues.

We think about that today because
it is similar to our spiritual foundation.

It also boils down to the local,
the personal, the place where
we are experiencing events,

the ways those events affect us as people, and
then inspire us to go to where we need to go.

Even church people want
to know how this or that will affect them,
their neighborhoods, their jobs,
their health benefits, and freedoms.

Who can blame them? Who can blame us?

The faithful congregation recites
I believe in God the Father Almighty...

I believe in Jesus Christ.. the crucified, died
and buried one...

Who descended to the dead and on
the third day rose again.

We say, I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Christian church that communes
with the saints... and logically question
what does it all
have to do with me? Or you?

How do the words connect to the person
that unexpectedly lost the love of their life?

What does it all mean for the choir member
that just had the shocking diagnosis?

For the 17 year old wondering what to do
with the rest of their life?

You see, the church is really good at speaking
about the ethereal and universal truths on Sunday,
or on Easter, and then it's just back out
into the world and the nitty gritty

decisions and responsibilities that come in life, and
we cannot help feeling disconnected...
from one another and from God.

The irony is not lost when we read
how the polls say our nation is,
by percentage, largely a believing one.

A nation that believes in a higher power.

Yet, still can't love its neighbors.

The problem (one of the problems) is that
the good, loving, and merciful God is like
a distant truth.

And that the Holy Spirit seems
quite n/a... not applicable.

Distant and untouchable...

So, many look for a "religious experience" and
think it can be packaged up and saved...
controlled.

But that is not the way with "burning hearts"
like the ones we read about in the gospel.

The Lord be with you... (And also with you.)

Burning hearts come by way of
shared experiences and reorienting attitudes.

Burning hearts come when there's a
response to God's word, in a community,
even when we make mistakes. (Pause)

My family took a vacation one year that brought us
to a house high up on a mountain in N. Georgia.

We got there but not without this one challenge.

The roadway was a steep dirt one and
there was this turn halfway up where you
needed to drive slowly cause you couldn't

see very well around it and
there were also ruts in the road from
the way previous cars had to step on the
gas in order to make the turn
to keep momentum.

Our problem was that when we'd slow down,
to navigate the turn and the ruts, and
then try to increase speed again
the car wouldn't do what we
wanted it to do.

The rpm's would just rev.

Time and time I tried to get enough speed,

go faster through the ruts but the result
was always the same.

The car would not move.

Then, in my infinite wisdom, I remembered
that reverse is a low gear, good for
traction and power, and my
front wheel drive vehicle would
be pushing instead of pulling.

That could work, I thought.
So picture this!

The Holdcraft's in their family "truckster" are
at the bottom of the dirt road and are
now going up it... you guessed it...
in reverse! :-)

No recipe for disaster here!

But, you know what? It worked!

I still recall the feeling of accomplishment
when we arrived at the top, in reverse! (Yeah... me)

My satisfaction was short lived, though.

My brother in law, Jeremy, clearly impressed said...

“You know Tom, there’s this traction button in
your car that you can turn off and the
vehicle will make that turn
without you losing power
on the incline. :-)

Suddenly my brilliance didn’t have much
real life traction.

In this same way, we consider the gospel
to seem like it’s true, but in real life
it doesn’t have much traction.

And if we don’t know better, we go
through it backwards.

Like what does God have to do with
the ins and outs of the everyday life
and challenges of people at the local level?

When we say, “Alleluia, Christ is risen!
Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!”

“We must be warned that the Easter celebration is
not genuine unless it touches the
private wounds and the tragedies
near-at-hand.” (Thomas Long)

In other words, Easter will only have its traction
when it comes to us at the local level,
in community, and
we feel our hearts burning.

Which is why today's gospel is so compelling.

Here we find these two people walking away
from Jerusalem, going backwards from
the place of tragedy
following the crucifixion.

They are weary and talking out everything
that had happened.

Talking and walking... walking and talking...
on this journey along the road to Emmaus.

The cosmic event of the crucifixion now zoomed in
for its local effect on these two people.

And as they walk and talk suddenly a
stranger comes to join them.

Now, we are let on as readers to know
who this stranger is but they don't know,
and they can't believe the guy
hadn't heard about all the things
that'd happened.

So, in their grief, they tell all that had occurred
and then report to the stranger what
the women disciples had said about
the angel's announcement of resurrection

and that even others ran to the tomb and
found it just as they'd said.

Empty, but they did not see anything else.

Notice the irony that Jesus is right there
with these two and are having an encounter
with the risen Christ but they don't "see"
or recognize what's happening.

Though they couldn't see Jesus, yet
Jesus was there.

We may also reflect that as
Easter fades in our rear view mirrors
we too can be talking and walking -
discussing (or wondering) how it all
could have happened?

And that is good because Jesus will be there...
but we must not miss recognizing Him.

Something begins to stir in these two

going backwards, though,

It happens when they have the scriptures
opened up to them, but
the real AHA is in the meal.

For that is where he is recognized.

In the familiar act of the Meal, we see Jesus.

Touch, taste, see, the Savior in the blessing,
the remembering, the breaking of bread,
and in the sharing.

There is Jesus at the local level for you -
for all, and our hearts are burning,
but we can't bottle it up or claim ownership.

Christ comes to the specific table accompanying us
in local issues in God's own time. (Pause)

We will also trod the road to Emmaus
because we know it is a path, a journey,
it is the Way of following Jesus.

And like the two who return to Jerusalem
once they recognized Christ...

We will also return to our places of tragedy
and find they've become
the place of resurrection.

They were carriers of good news to the group
they left and the group they'd left had their
own local experiences with the Risen Lord
which they proclaimed to them!

We come and journey united and
some are standing still, sad,
though all journey,

and there's hope and soon there's
great joy because the encounter with
the Risen Christ is local... intimate.

Like waking up to new relationships
with eyes suddenly opened
and hearts on fire.

AMEN!