

OPENING SENTENCE:

When Jesus speaks, our hearts burn within us; our eyes are open when he breaks the bread.

PRAYER of ADORATION:

My Lord and creator, Your goodness encourages me to converse with You. Your mercy abolishes the chasm which separates the Creator from the creature. To converse with You, O Lord, is the delight of my heart. In You I find everything that my heart could desire. Here, Your light illumines my mind, enabling it to know You more and more deeply. Here streams of graces flow down upon my heart. Here my soul draws eternal life. O my Lord and creator, You alone, beyond all these gifts, give Your own self to me and unite Yourself intimately with Your miserable creature.

Sermon: Just a Closer Walk with Thee

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

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 priest 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 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.

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

The morning begins at mid-day on the road with two sorry disciples who have bet their lives on the wrong savior. Where are they headed? They are headed back to the fishing nets, tax offices, missed appointments, and merciful routines. They are on the road that will return them to what is called the human condition. What should we do when we have reached our wit's end, when what we once thought was worth our lives has left us washed up emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually?

The appearance on the road to Emmaus is one of the most enticing stories of the Gospel literature. The story is unique to Luke and characteristic of his style and perspective. The passage follows Luke's account of the discovery of the empty tomb (vv. 1-12); the women report their discovery to the eleven (v.9) but are met with disbelief. Peter, however, runs to the tomb, finds it as they had reported and goes home amazed. The Emmaus story serves as a transition between the ambiguous reaction to the empty tomb and the ultimate appearance of Jesus to all of the disciples. (vv.36-53).

The account begins poignantly, with two of the disciples who have heard the women's "idle tale" (v.11) leaving the community and making their way to Emmaus, a village "seven miles" from Jerusalem. They converse about the dramatic events that have taken place. As the story unfolds, they will, in effect, give a summary of Jesus' mission and the story of his passion, but without full understanding. This latter point is one of the fundamental purposes of the Emmaus story – the risen Christ reveals to the disciples the true meaning of his death and resurrection.

The setting of this story in the context of a journey is also typical of Luke, who places Jesus' entire mission in the context of a journey that moves from Galilee to Jerusalem and ultimately through the ascension, to the right hand of God. Luke cast the unfolding history of the early community as a journey, beginning in Jerusalem and reaching "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The community itself would be named the "People of the journey" (Acts 9:2; 22:4; 24:14,22).

For Luke the journey of Jesus and of the church itself expresses the unfolding history of salvation that finds its origin in Israel and through the Spirit extends salvation to the "ends of the earth".

The key moment comes when the risen Jesus joins the two disciples and walks with them. They fail to recognize him, but one of them, Cleopas, responds to Jesus' leading question about the events they were pondering. Filled with melancholy the two disciples recount the events that have so changed their world. Their way of describing Jesus and his mission as a "prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (v.19) fits well into Luke's perspective, beginning with the inaugural scene in Jesus' hometown synagogue of Nazareth where he announces his prophetic mission (4:16-30) and in subsequent scenes where Jesus is acclaimed as a prophet (7:16) and expresses his own fierce commitment to healing and exorcism as God's prophet (13:31-35). In Acts also, both Peter and Stephen refer to Jesus as a prophet sent by God.

The Emmaus disciples "had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (v.21), but the death of Jesus had shattered those hopes. The reader is reminded of the longing for redemption that broke out in the opening of the Gospel story: Zechariah gives thanks to God that the longed-for salvation will be fulfilled (1:68), and the temple prophets Simeon and Anna have been waiting the moment of Israel's redemption (2:30,38). To compound the disciple's despair, some of the women in the community have brought back the preposterous news that the tomb was empty and claimed they had a vision of angels announcing that Jesus was alive (vv. 22-24).

Luke has set the stage for Jesus' own interpretation of his sufferings. The suffering and death of Jesus were to be understood not as an ultimate defeat of God's purpose, but as the necessary pathway to new life. The risen Jesus illumines this for his disciples by appealing to the teaching of "Moses and all the prophets," indeed drawing on the lesson of "all the scriptures" (v.27). It is futile to attempt to identify specific passages. The pattern of life emerging from death is, in fact, a fundamental pattern of the entire biblical saga.

From the original chaos God creates life. From slavery of Egypt come freedom and a homeland. From the destruction of exile comes a renewed people. Jesus' interpretation of the scriptures for the disciples gives them true understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection; now their hearts "burn" within them (v.32). Here is a key point of Luke's account; the risen Christ present within the community enables them gradually to understand the full meaning of the paschal mystery.

The story reaches its climax with a meal shared with Jesus and the disciples. As evening approaches and Jesus appears to go on his way, the disciples implore him to stay with them. (This tells of Jesus' courtesy. He would not force himself upon them; he awaited their invitation to come in. We can invite Christ into

our lives or allow him to pass on.) Meals are a hallmark of Luke's narrative, and he concludes this account in the same way. These meals evoke the longed-for gatherings of Israel and express the inclusive spirit of Jesus' own mission. Full revelation of who Jesus is and what his death and resurrection means come at the meal (vv. 31,35).

Jesus' words and gestures are the same as at the feeding of the multitude (v. 9:16) and reminiscent of the final Passover meal (v. 22:19).

Without a doubt Luke also intends the reader to make a connection with the celebrations of the "Breaking of the bread" described in Acts.

At the conclusion of the story, the risen Jesus vanishes from their sight, and the two disciples leave immediately to return to the community in Jerusalem. There, they learn that the risen Jesus has already appeared to Simon, and they too give their testimony about their encounter on the road and at the meal. Luke has driven home several of his characteristic themes: that Jesus' death and resurrection are in accord with God's plan of salvation; the dawning understanding of the community's experience based on their reflection on the scriptures and the inspiration of the Spirit of the risen Jesus; the breaking of the bread as a rich symbol of the community's life and mission; the importance of not leaving the community but persevering with it.

It should not be surprising that this story moves from isolation to community. Christ joins himself to those on the way, who then make space for him in the village. God always creates space for the "other" in order that true community might be formed.

After Jesus is no longer in view, the disciples begin to talk with one another with transparent self-revelation: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (v. 32). Scripture is best understood in community, because we need others to interrogate our narrow-minded readings; indeed, we need others' interpretations to challenge a narrowness of heart.

What they had experienced must be shared. The return to Jerusalem denotes the outward spiral of the Gospel. News this good must be shared. News this transforming creates new community. Those illuminated by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ must offer witness to others that they too might come to know him in the breaking of the bread.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord's resurrection, may, through the renewing power of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN.

BENEDICTION:

In a moment of tangible love that embraces the brokenness of betrayal and cross, the rays of Easter's sunrise have illuminated the crypt of their entombed hopes. Broken bread nurses our broken faith and can nourish the courage we need to leave our grave clothes behind and vacate the vault of our defeated dreams. The weary travelers feel alive; their hearts are renewed. The witness of the women at the empty tomb is now their testimony too. In the breaking of the bread, the beams of resurrection's dawn have reached about seven miles from Jerusalem. Their burning hearts illuminate their blind eyes and quicken their weary souls for a seven-mile nighttime run in the moonlight of Easter. Their sacred city is made holy again, and our pilgrimage of faith has just begun. AMEN.