

Scripture Lesson

Luke 24:13-35

Prayer for Illumination

Guide us, O God,
by your Word and Holy Spirit,
that in your light we may see light,
in your truth find freedom,
and in your will discover your peace.
Amen.

Sermon

Heart Burn – A Good Sign

If we were doing a Time with Children this morning, I'd show a favorite toy, a *matryoshka* (*babushka*) nesting doll. Everyone knows how these dolls work—the concept is so simple. Inside the doll is another doll just like her, only a little smaller. And inside that second doll is another one; and so on, until you get to the center of the toy, which, of course, is the smallest doll of all. Some *matryoshkas* are themed, with each doll depicting a different figure or some other component of a larger narrative/group. So, you might have Cinderella and her mean stepmother, then each ugly step-sister, the fairy god-mother, the prince, and at the center, of course, the glass slipper. Many Bible stories work on a similar principle, unfolding in layers to reveal a key point at their center. Especially where you see or hear repetition—like the familiar outline of the same figure—chances are, in the middle of the story is the takeaway, like a piece of hidden treasure or the toy surprise in a box of Cracker Jack.

The story before us works this way. The technical term for this literary device is a **chiasm** (or chiasmus). Again, repetition is the key; in a chiasm, a sequence of things is presented and then repeated in reverse. You may not have noticed the repetition when we read the story a moment ago, so, let's look at it again [*slide*]. "That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had *happened*." The story begins with two followers of Jesus walking and talking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus [**A1** – first element/outermost layer, vv. 13 & 14]. "While they were talking and discussing together"—see the repetition?—"Jesus drew near and went with them." And here the gospel writer adds a key detail: the two don't recognize Jesus. So, element **B1**, vv. 15 & 16: Jesus appears, unrecognized.

What *happens* next [**C1**]? This next portion of the story is a bit longer. Jesus joins the conversation and invites Cleopas and his companion (maybe his wife) to remember and to recount what has *happened* (remember v. 14?). The focus of this section is on story, Jesus' story; which is interesting, because that's how we're receiving it; and it's ironic [dramatic irony] because we know more than the two travelers on the Emmaus road. We know they're walking and talking with Jesus. My favorite part of this section is the way it begins, with Jesus asking, What are you two talking about? And Cleopas answers, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who doesn't know what's *happened* there in these days?" I wish I knew Hebrew better: I hear Cleopas almost saying to Jesus, Where have you been? What rock have you been under the past three days?! Jesus might have wrapped up the whole episode right there. He might have said, Now that you mention it, let me tell you about the rock I've been under....But instead he invites them to recollect and to recount the story they know, which they do in verses 19-24 [**C1**].

Which brings us to the end of the framing or layered elements in the story we're reading [A, B, C]. So, let's see how they're repeated, in reverse. Did you notice how the story seems to repeat itself when the travelers get to Emmaus? As *happened* when Jesus appeared (15), there's a pause in the conversation at verses 28 & 29

[C2]. This time it's the disciples who invite—they invite Jesus to continue with them, to stay and rest and eat with them. Jesus accepts that invitation, and the recollection piece happens when he takes the bread and blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them. This way Jesus recounts a story, too—a story of feeding 5,000, the story of the Passover, the Last Supper. And at precisely that point, what *happens*? Do you see the pattern of reversal? At verse 31, in reverse order, the followers recognize Jesus, and he disappears [32, B2]. And the story closes, of course, with the two walking and talking again, on the road again, this time in the opposite direction, from Emmaus to Jerusalem [A2].

Amazing, isn't it? Now you know what a **chiasm** is. The Bible is full of them. I mentioned that the architecture of some chiasms guides us to a piece of buried treasure. You'll notice that we conveniently skipped over verses 25-27. There it is: literally at the center of this story is its focal point: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." The key to the whole story is that **Jesus is Messiah**. He is the Christ. He is the one to redeem Israel. He is the one they had hoped for after all (21). That, my friends, is the *heart* of this story.

Cleopas and his friend cannot *see* this, of course, until Jesus turns ordinary table fellowship into a sacrament. My favorite part of this story is the most delicious irony at its heart. These two couldn't see the living Christ before experiencing him as both Word (27) and Sacrament (30). But they *felt* the truth before they could fully see it. Did you catch it? "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'" (32). How's that for irony? These folks had heart-burn before they even ate!

Of course, the story doesn't end there, even with the meal. The Jesus story isn't complete until his followers reverse course and do something with the revelation they've experienced. Their hearts burn again, this time for their fellow disciples who, as far as they know, are still burdened by the dejection and hopelessness that sent Cleopas and his friend schlepping down the road to Emmaus in the first place. So, back they go—now revived, full of glorious hope—to share the good news. They go back to tell the story again, to help their friends, as Jesus has taught them, to remember and to believe. I'm guessing there was more bread-breaking back in Jerusalem.

The way Luke tells it, Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus were the first people to see the risen Christ. When they get back to the upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus appears to the larger group there; and so, the story continues and its reach extends. But if that were the whole story, all believers except those few who saw the resurrected Jesus firsthand would experience only the absence of Jesus. All generations after would have been secondhand Christians, fated to try to keep faith alive on the thin diet of these scant reports of others having once seen him. But Luke tells us here that the living Christ is both the key to our understanding the Scriptures and the very present Lord revealed to us in the breaking of bread. "His presence makes all believers first-generation Christians and every place Emmaus" (Craddock 287).

So, welcome to Emmaus. Whatever road you're on, you don't have to travel it alone. Is your heart burning? You may need to turn around. You may need to share it. You have the Scriptures with their ^bhidden secret. You have the Sacrament which brings that secret home. You have each other. Wherever you are, you have Jesus, risen from the dead, inviting you to new life. If your heart yearns for that—if you have that kind of heart-burn—that's a very good sign, the most important sign of all: Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed, in you. Alleluia!

On the Road to Emmaus— a chiasm

A1 walking & talking on the road → Emmaus [Luke 24:13 & 14]

B1 Jesus appears, unrecognized [vv. 15 & 16]

C1 conversation, invitation, recollection (story) [17 -24]

teaching – Scripture [25 -27]

²⁷**Jesus is Messiah**

C2 conversation, invitation, teaching – Supper [28 -30]

B2 recognized, Jesus disappears [31 -32]

A2 walking & talking on the road → Jerusalem [33 -35]