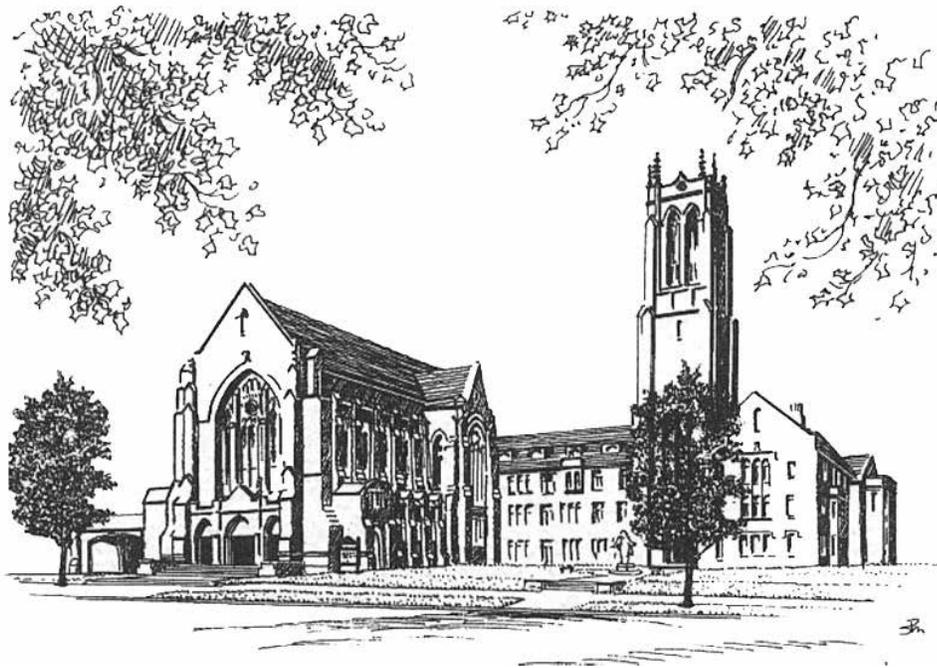


HEARTS ON FIRE
by
Rev. Thomas A. (Tommy) Williams
May 4, 2014
Third Sunday of Easter
8:30 and 11:05 a.m.



ST. PAUL'S

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Texts: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; and John 10:1-10

Acts 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²²“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

John 10:1-10

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Who doesn't love a good meal?

And, most people enjoy a good walk.

Well, according to our scripture today, a walk and a meal can transform your life, especially with the right companion — one companion in particular.

There is a phrase I have come across recently from Latin: *solvitur ambulando*. “It will be solved in the walking.”

Solvitur ambulando. Our word *amble* comes from the same Latin word: *ambulare*, to walk.

Solvitur ambulando seems to be God's way of doing things. Think of all the walking God does in the Bible. God walks in the garden at creation. God goes to Abram and guides Abram's travels. God travels with Moses and Israel in the wilderness. In the New Testament, Jesus walks and calls the disciples. He walks along the road and encounters the weak and the poor. He walks to those who cannot walk. He also walks to the rich and to the powerful. And then Jesus "sets his face to go to Jerusalem." He walks toward Jerusalem — toward the cross, toward death, toward resurrection. After the resurrection, Jesus walks to Emmaus and the disciple's hearts burn within them in the best way while they walk together.

Solvitur ambulando. "It will be solved in the walking."

Especially on days like we've been having, it might be a good idea to take a walk and see what you notice. Or rather, recognize the Christ who walks with you.

I've never understood exactly what it means here when it says, "they were 'kept' from recognizing Jesus" except that the passive tense suggests they were kept supernaturally from seeing. Maybe Jesus wanted them— and us — to understand that sometimes He will come in ordinary ways and unrecognizable ways at first.

Like with walks and bread at supper and in this strange and wondrous book of words and stories we call Scripture — Holy from God.

Even the two travelers themselves seem wonderfully ordinary. One is named Cleopas (we haven't heard about him anywhere in the Biblical story), and the other is even unnamed. And they are on their way to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem.

We are meant to place ourselves on this road with Jesus and ask:

What blinds us?

What keeps you from seeing?

Who keeps us from seeing the Risen Christ?

From post-Easter story to post-Easter story in the Gospels, you have occasions where in the disciples are so clouded by grief and fear that they are either hiding, doubting, afraid, or bewildered. And who could blame them.

These two disciples are united in their disappointment when they say – “but we had hoped that he was the One...”

“But we had hoped.” Tragic words. So much is said there...

Once challenged to write a short story in six words, Ernest Hemingway wrote, “For sale, baby shoes, never used.”

But we had hoped. You see, it’s not just the tragedy of what happens that hurts; it is the tragedy of the unrealized future, the dream that you think will never be fulfilled, the hopes that end up being just that — hopes and nothing more. This felt like that for the disciples.

But we had hoped...they poignantly say — for themselves, and for us who have known grief, fear and dashed dreams.

You’ve been in that place, and that’s where the disciples are on the road. Jesus walks alongside them here. He could have said, “hey hey, it’s me, don’t be sad, keep your chin up, your best life is now, everything is good.”

But he doesn’t rush his way into recognition but allows them to recount their grief, tell their story and work it through on that walk, in the telling of the scripture and the supper. In all of it they hear the larger story of what God has done and is doing.

It is over the meal later that they are then able to recognize that the future they thought was dead is actually alive. It looked different than they had imagined, but indeed their future is alive and full of hope and even better than what they had imagined.

And ours is, too. Future, alive, hopeful — for this life and for the life to come.

One of the great leaders and theologians in the first 1,000 years of the church was St. Augustine. His early life was spent in affluence, intellectual pur-

suit, and a fair amount of promiscuity. But somehow he was drawn to deeper things. He explored Christianity, but it became like a puzzle to him that he couldn't solve. He tried to read the Bible, but it seemed very strange to him. His instructor in the faith was a person named Ambrose, later a bishop in the church of Italy.

When Augustine told him that he could not understand the Bible and that he thought that for literary value, the Bible did not compare to the great works of Antiquity, Ambrose gave him this advice: "You read the Bible too intellectually and too literally. You have to read it as a personal story and with imagination."

Ambrose said to Augustine, "When you read, you erroneously think that a fish is a fish, a loaf of bread is just a loaf of bread and nothing more. In the Bible, everyday things are transformed and become signs for deeper, richer meaning."

And for Augustine, a whole new world was then opened up. He began reading the Bible, not as a code or puzzle to be solved, but as a personal story about his life in relationship to God. He read with imagination and expectation, and it changed his life.

Trying to "find God" or be on the lookout for the presence of Christ is not a puzzle to be solved, but about a relationship to be explored and experienced. This is the essence of the Emmaus road experience and the Christian life. It is experience and encounter with the Risen Christ made known in the every day and ordinary.

A well-known Jesuit priest from the 20th century, Pedro Arrupe, once shared the experience of visiting some fellow priests in a Latin American slum that was desperately poor. During his visit, he celebrated mass for the local people in a small decrepit building; cats and dogs wandered in and out during the mass.

Afterward, Arrupe was invited to the house of one of the members of the congregation and received an unexpected gift:

When worship was over a man, whose look made me almost afraid said, “come to my place. I have something to give you.”

I was undecided; I didn’t know whether to accept or not. But the local priest who was with me said, “Accept, they are good people.”

I went to his place; his house was a hovel nearly on the point of collapsing. He had me sit down on a rickety chair. From there I could see the sunset.

The man said to me, “look, sir, how beautiful it is!”

We sat in silence for several minutes. The sun disappeared.

The man then said, “I didn’t know how to thank you for all you have done for us. I have nothing to give you, but I thought you would like to see this sunset. You liked it, didn’t you?”

Good evening. And then he shook my hand and we departed.

Arrupe was humbled. And aren’t we too? when Christ shows up in the most modest and ordinary of spaces and makes them holy and transformative — like walks on the road, rickety rocking chairs, sunsets, the scriptural story told, bread broken.

In these holy moments we could easily join in with those disciples and say, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scripture to us?”

Set us on fire Lord.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.