

Heartburn
Luke 24: 13-34

The story I'm about to read is one of my favorite Easter stories. But I haven't preached on it since 2004. Probably because the last time I told this story, I humiliated myself. Some of you might remember it. So, I'll read the story and then tell you what happened in 2004. We will pick it up right after the part that Pastor Megan read earlier:

¹³That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹And Jesus said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹But 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 happened. ²²Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

²⁵And Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with

them. ³⁰When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³²They 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?"

That last line is obviously the climax. "Did not our hearts burn within us?" On that Easter morning 12 years ago, as I approached this verse, I picked up my pace, raised my voice—I was doing all the stuff you do to get your listeners excited for this moment in the story. Finally, I reached the punchline, paused for a moment, and then, with a dramatic flourish, I said, "Did not our farts burn within us?!!"

I tried to keep going, hoping that no one would catch on. They caught on! A chuckle over here, a snort over there... and pretty soon, the whole place was in stitches. I stood here knowing I had completely lost control! Scarred for life! So, for me to return to this text is an act of supreme bravery. Aren't you proud of me? Let's take a closer look at this incredible story.

First, when did it take place? Verse 13 says on "...that very day." What "very day" is Luke talking about? Resurrection Day. Easter Sunday. Could we just pause here for a moment? Earlier that morning, Jesus was lying in a tomb that had been sealed by a huge stone—cold and dead. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit breathed life back into him. He gasped, opened his eyes, his heart began to pump again and he got up. Dead man walking! This is the moment that changed eternity! The Son of God raised to life after being executed on a cross. So this is a big day in Jesus' career, wouldn't you agree?

Surely, on Day One of his Resurrection, Jesus will have a full schedule: lots of appearances to prove that he really is alive. At the top of list, the disciples, right? His hand-picked inner circle... Surely the first thing on Jesus' agenda will be a meet and greet with Peter and James and John and the rest right there in Jerusalem, right?

No! Before Jesus even appears to the disciples (that will happen later on that evening) the newly risen Son of God chooses to spend his first resurrection afternoon walking on a road with two virtual strangers. We know almost nothing about them. One is named Cleopas; besides that nothing. They were nobodies in the gospel story. We're not even sure they were both men; some think this was a husband and wife walking back home together. And after this story, they disappear into the mists of history.

Isn't it amazing that Jesus would prioritize his time this way? Easter Day: walking, talking and eating with two people who don't even recognize him. And it's not a ten-minute appointment; they walked seven miles! That took a couple of hours, and then, they invited him to dinner. Three, maybe four, hours out of the most

important day in the history of the world, Jesus chose to spend hanging out with two nobodies.

Except they weren't nobodies to Jesus, were they! They mattered to him. We don't know the second person's name; but Jesus did. We don't know their story; Jesus took the time to listen. For us Type-A, fill up your schedule, plan your work and work your plan types, this is a very wasteful use of the greatest Grand Opening in history. But Jesus didn't think it was wasteful at all.

I wonder; is there anyone here this morning who feels like a spiritual nobody? But you can't imagine that Jesus knows you, cares about you, has the time of day for you. After all, he's got a universe to run; a messed-up world that needs his attention. Who has time for a nobody like you? This story says you are not a nobody to Jesus. You, and you, and you, and you all of you matter deeply to him. Do you need to hear that this Easter? Jesus knows your name, knows your story, and you matter to him!

Let's look a little further. Maybe Jesus chose these two because they were so faithful! They had heard of the resurrection of Jesus; they believed it! They were excited to see what the risen Christ was going to do next. Could that be it?

Not at all. Listen: ¹⁷*And Jesus said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" "And they stood still, looking sad." They are walking along, arguing and Jesus sidles up to them. We are told that they were kept from recognizing him. We don't know how, but they didn't know it was Jesus. And he asks them, "What are you guys talking about?" They stop dead in their tracks and they look sad! Bummed out! Then Cleopas asks this great question: "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*

This is funny! Essentially, Cleopas says to Jesus, "Are you kidding me? What rock have you been living under?" Jesus could have said, "Well, I haven't exactly been living under a rock, more like behind one... but go ahead, tell me what you're talking about." This is great comedy. Jesus plays dumb and, since they don't recognize him, they launch into this laundry list of what He was supposed to have done!

They had such great expectations for him. Maybe they were there on Palm Sunday, laying down their robes and crying out to Jesus, "Hosanna! Save us!" They expected Jesus to storm into Jerusalem, kick out the Romans and restore the Kingdom of Israel. But it didn't happen like that, did it? Jesus made his dramatic entrance on Palm Sunday, and five days later, he was dead!

So they are sad... disappointed. Sure there was a rumor about Jesus rising from the dead, but who could believe that? It sure wasn't enough to keep them in Jerusalem. Only hours after this purported resurrection they are blowing town! They aren't

even hopeful enough to stick around and see how things pan out. They are disappointed, and it is captured in verse 21: *"But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."* We had hoped...

This is a story of dashed hopes... of heartbreak. This first Easter was, for Cleopas and his friend, a day of disappointment. They had such high hopes for Jesus, and Jesus didn't come through. He let them down!

There are some here this Easter who, if you were honest, would admit that you are disappointed with Jesus. Maybe you believed, or prayed, or even went to church, but the time came when you really wanted Jesus to step up and you felt let down. And that makes you sad.

I spoke with a man whose marriage failed. He never thought he would be divorced, but here he is, living with dashed hopes... and feeling like Jesus let him down. I heard this week of another man who was a faithful church-goer until he and his wife experienced two still-births. Their hopes were dashed; and now, they are walking away from Jerusalem—walking away from a disappointing Jesus.

That's how these travelers felt. But notice how patient Jesus is. He could have just pulled back his robe said, "Ta da! Here I am! I'm alive, and you can stop being sad now!" But that's not how Jesus deals with these disappointed disciples—not with a dramatic disclosure, but with an unhurried walk and conversation. He even leads them in a Bible study. Wouldn't you have given anything to hear Jesus teach about all the ways the Old Testament pointed to Him?

It was such a powerful experience that when they arrived at their destination and Jesus started to leave, they begged him to stay for dinner. And it was then, when he blessed the bread and broke it, that suddenly their eyes were opened and they recognized who they had spent the day with. And just as suddenly, Jesus vanished from their sight and they sit there in amazement and remark, "Did not our hearts burn within us!"

What a transformation! That afternoon they were heartbroken; by the evening they were heart-burning... the good kind! Doesn't every person long for that—hearts on fire, living with passion? Especially when it comes to our spiritual lives... But one of the reasons so many people come on Easter, but no other time in the year, is this feeling of spiritual flatness! Like this stuff doesn't make any difference.

But what if it did? What if your heart could be set on fire? The key is found in three short words in verse 29. "Stay with us!" They came to the end of their journey and Jesus seems to be moving on, and they cry out, "Stay with us!" The Greek suggests this was a passionate plea... almost coercive. "Stay with us; you must stay with us." Remember, they still did not know who this man was. All they knew was this: the more time they spent with him, the more time they wanted to spend with him. There was something about him that lit their fire.

About a year ago, I met a woman at a concert. She turned out to be a neighbor down our street. Days later on my way home as I drove by, I saw her in the yard. I stopped, rolled down the window and said, "Cyndi and I would love to come over some time and say, "Hi." I'll never forget her response: "Oh, no; don't do that. I don't want you to come." That's not exactly what I was expecting. I thought I might hear, "Great. Come on! Have tea with me! Let's become better acquainted." Instead, it was, "Oh, no; don't do that. I don't want you to come."

I wonder how many here this morning would say the same thing to Jesus. He is right here, eager to have a relationship with us, eager to turn broken hearts into burning hearts. All we need to do is say, "Stay with us! Stay with me!" Instead, from many, he hears these sad words, "Oh no; don't do that. I don't want you to come."

The other morning I got up about 4:00, put on the coffee and pulled out a fig bar. I thought it might taste better warm so, in my early-morning stupor, I put it in the microwave and pressed start. Turns out, that fig bar had a foil wrapping. Suddenly, little lightning bolts were shooting around inside my microwave. The foil started burning and by the time I frantically stabbed the stop button, my fig bar was encased in a smoking mass of metal. I just wanted a little warm-up and I ended up with lightning bolts; it was a very surprising start to my day!

Some of you came this morning for a little spiritual warm-up. But what if Jesus wants to surprise you? Maybe not lightning bolts, but I can tell you that He would love to light a spark of passion in your heart. And the starting point might be those simple words: Stay with us! You sense Jesus is present right now; don't let him slip away. Call out to him to him. "Jesus, if you are real, stay with us... stay with me!"

We would love to share that walk with you. That's our heart! Next weekend we begin the second half of a journey through the entire Bible called *The Story*. Like those disciples on the road, we are learning how Jesus can be found throughout the whole Bible, from the earliest pages on. And, like those travelers, next weekend, we are going to sit down for a meal with the Lord—the Lord's Supper. When was the last time you received communion? Maybe the Lord will open our eyes together.

And maybe you've tried all this before and, like the two travelers, were disappointed. I understand. Religion can disappoint. Churches can disappoint. Christians can disappoint. Pastors can disappoint. But you will never be disappointed if you will these words: "Jesus, will you stay with me?"

Prayer.