

Luke 24:13-49 – Preached on April 6, 2008

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?” ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over 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 took place.

²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.” ²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

³²They 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?” ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.

³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

My hope for today is that each one of us leaves church this morning with heartburn. I honestly do. Now some of you are probably thinking I'm turning into a really crabby pregnant pastor, but give me a chance to explain.

Today's gospel lesson is about heartburn...about Jesus' followers experiencing heartburn. But this is HOLY heartburn...the experience of God's presence in their midst. Walking along the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his friend didn't recognize that Jesus was the one walking next to them. But they FELT something. They sensed God's presence. They felt passion and a sense of purpose. They even told the story of the resurrection to Jesus and they were filled with burning hearts for the story!

My cousin recently told me a story about her son, Michael. Each night they have a routine where Michael puts his pajamas on, brushes his teeth, walks down to his bedroom, and then says his prayers with his parents. One interesting thing about these prayers each night is that they take a really long time. Michael has to pray for everyone he knows. Each of his classmates, everyone in the family, his teachers and his friends. My cousin said that this one particular night, Michael was listing off all of these people and my cousin remembered that she wanted Michael to pray for something else.

And so she interrupted him. She said, "Michael, I also want you to pray for"—and before she could finish, Michael held up his hand and said, "Hold on a second, mom, I'm online with God right now and you don't want to interrupt us."

What an example of having holy heartburn – to be so passionate about prayer time that even his mother couldn't interrupt Michael! To be so eager to talk to God that nothing was going to get in the way.

Have you had holy heartburn? Has there been a time when you've been moved to action by something that excited you? In my own life, I remember experiencing holy heartburn when I went on mission trips when I was in college. I belonged to a Habitat for Humanity college campus group, and each spring break, we would take a trip to somewhere in the United States and build homes for a week.

There were parts of those trips that I could have done without. The long van rides, usually with someone having stinky feet or getting carsick. I could have done without having to sleep on a gym floor with about 200 other college volunteers during our week. But none of that compared to the work that we were able to do for families. My heart was so full each time I went on those trips. One of the most memorable times was when we went to Americus, Georgia, which is the birthplace of Habitat for Humanity.

We participated in what was called a Blitz Build, where literally hundreds of people come together for a week to build as many houses as possible. Our goal that week was to build twelve houses. This was designated for college students only, and so if I remember correctly, there were over 500 college students volunteering their time over Spring Break to build these houses.

We met people from all over the country – Minnesota, California, Texas, Tennessee. Our first day on the job was intimidating. There was nothing but twelve cement slabs with a few pipes

sticking up from them. But then we got to work. And after day two, we had the entire structure of the house up.

By the end of day three, we had the tresses for the roof up. By day four, the entire house was insulated and the outer walls were in, as well as the shingling on the roof. By the end of day 5, the cabinets in the house and the walls were in. And by the last day, everything was done on the house except the installation of the electricity.

I will never forget the day that I was putting shingling on the roof. It was time for lunch, and we all gathered in the basement of this one church for our meals. I was getting ready to climb down from the roof, and I looked up to see that the entire street was filled with college students. And I could see these houses progressing from cement slabs into homes.

And to think that now, twelve families are able to live in an affordable, quality home. Yes, I definitely had heartburn those weeks. I knew I was doing God's work...I knew that I was called to be on those trips.

What about you? Have you experienced any heartburn lately? Maybe something you've been able to do here, at the church, or maybe it's been something that you've done at work or school or in the community.

But think about it for a moment. Where are your passions? What moves you to action? Where are you finding that you want to be involved?

Pay attention to those things because most likely, God is calling you to those places.

One of the most memorable heartburn moments for me since I've been here was Easter Sunday. We had wonderful, celebratory services and there is one moment that really sticks out in my mind. At the second service, right at the end, we invited the children to come forward for a special children's sermon. I talked about how Easter was a time for celebrating that Jesus had risen from the dead and how we sing upbeat songs because of that.

We then handed out homemade shakers – water bottles filled with popcorn kernels – to each of the children, and we asked them to help us out with the final song by shaking those noisemakers as loud as they could.

And boy, did they ever shake! We could barely hear ourselves sing as those kids made noise. But that was holy noise. And to see the children up here, so enthusiastically and with so much excitement was what made my heart burn. What a way to end an Easter celebration – seeing children at worship making noise for God and loving every minute of it!

Have you had any heartburn moments like that? And don't feel worried or ashamed if you haven't. Sometimes it takes awhile to figure out where God is in your life...sometimes it's difficult to know where God is calling you. Those two disciples on the road with Jesus didn't even recognize Jesus when he was walking right next to them. Sometimes prayers feel like

they're not heard. Sometimes our faith seems to take a back seat to whatever else is going on in our lives.

But that's why Jesus comes to us in ways that we CAN see...in ways that we CAN grasp. In the bread and the wine at the table of communion. Those disciples didn't know Jesus was in their midst until he broke bread with them and drank wine. We have this tangible presence of God in our midst to remind us that we are never alone in our life. We are not left alone to figure out where our hearts burn. We are not left alone in our journeys of faith.

In our gospel story, one disciple was named Cleopas. But what about the other? The other is you. Or me. Luke left a blank space for us to fill in our own names. All our hopelessness is there on the road to Emmaus, every broken down dream, every doubt we've ever had or still have.

Are you waiting for a clearer revelation, for deeper assurance of Jesus' presence in your life? I would like that, too, and some days, that assurance is as close as my own breathing. Are you still waiting for your heart to burn?

The journey of faith is usually slow, and most of our experiences are utterly ordinary. A little boy saying his prayers. A mission trip. A bunch of children making noise in church. Beautiful new banners being displayed around the church. New members being received. Along the way we are sustained as the disciples were by hearing over and over words of scripture we have heard before.

Sometimes, it happens that our hearts burn and we hear as though for the first time. Then at a table or an altar, beside a hospital bed or in a nursing home, someone takes bread, blesses and breaks it and holds it out. One of those who receives the bread is named Cleopas. And the other? You.

We come this morning to receive the One who will instill in us that passion that we long for. We come this morning to the table to receive the presence of the One who created each one of us for purpose here on this earth. We come this morning to receive the promise that along the journey of our lives, Jesus is right here with us.

And that bread and that wine will indeed give us holy heartburn. Our song of the day, Day of Arising, can be our prayer this morning. Pay attention to the words, especially the last verse, "Christ, our companion, hope for the journey, bread of compassion, open our eyes. Grant us your vision, set all hearts burning that all of creation with you may rise."

Our prayer is that each one of us be filled with a renewed passion for our faith.

We will leave this church this morning, fed with the risen Christ, and with heartburn that I pray will be too strong for you to ignore. Amen.