HeartBurn

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James

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Were not our hearts burning while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? 24.32

We normally associate heartburn with a burning sensation in the chest caused by acid reflux. One out of every five of us suffer from heartburn on a weekly basis. Today, I want to talk about another kind of heartburn, the good kind. Two of the people in our story describe their meeting with Jesus this way: “Did not our hearts burn within us when we talked with Jesus on the road and he opened the Scriptures to us?” (24:32).

Periodically, I go through dry spells in my relationship with Christ. When I am not feeling it with God, spiritual practices become onerous and difficult. Prayer becomes rote and stale. Reading the Bible loses its appeal. I find myself going through the motions of worship. Those of you who have followed Jesus for any length of time may identify with what I am describing.

I experienced such a dry spell recently. It may have had something to do with traveling to Ohio last week for a family funeral. I become sluggish in hot weather. Sometimes I downshift my passion for Christ during the summer months.

This sermon is for you who are, have been or will be in a desert place. Lord, set our hearts on fire. Give us heartburn for your Word. Ignite more passion for you.

Today, we come to Luke 24, the final chapter in Luke’s gospel. We will come back to Luke again this fall in his sequel to the gospel, the Book of Acts.
It is now late in the day on Easter Sunday. Two of Jesus’ disciples are returning home from the Passover in Jerusalem. They are trying to wrap their heads around the report that the women who went to Jesus’ tomb found it empty.

Jesus joins their homeward journey, yet they fail to recognize him. Luke tells us, “They were kept from recognizing Jesus” (24:16). Since the verb “were kept” appears in passive form, most likely God prevents them from recognizing Jesus.

They were kept from recognizing Jesus. 24.16

Jesus asks them what they are discussing. Luke identifies one of them as Cleopas. Since Luke’s readers would be familiar with Cleopas, his name would trigger the identity of this other disciple also.

Cleopas reacts with understandable surprise: “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened in these days?” (24:18).

Do not miss the irony. Jesus knows all too well the events of these past few days. In truth, he is the only one who knows the entirety of what has happened.

Yet, Jesus decides to play dumb. “What things?” he asks (24:19). They correctly identify Jesus as a mighty prophet yet fail to connect the dots about the meaning of his death and resurrection. A suffering Messiah makes no sense to
them. They tell their mysterious travelling companion, “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (24:21). More irony. Jesus’ death and resurrection offers redemption to Israel and everybody, for that matter. They close out their executive summary by reporting the news from earlier in the day about the empty tomb.

Jesus, whose identity remains hidden, opens the Scripture to them. He teaches that the Messiah must first suffer the indignity of the cross before entering into God’s glory in the resurrection. Maybe God keeps these disciples from recognizing Jesus so He could correct their thinking about the importance of his death and resurrection.

The two disciples arrive at their destination. Jesus acts as though he is going further without them. They urge him to stay for the evening meal. In Luke’s gospel, meals serve as the backdrop for significant pivotal moments in Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus takes over at the table, shifting from honored guest to gracious host. We read, “Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them” (24:30). These four same verbs occur in identical order in two other stories in Luke’s gospel. First, in the feeding of the 5000, where we read, “Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, broke them and gave them to his disciples” (9:16). Second, at the Last Supper, where “Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them” (22:19). The identical language is hardly coincidental. When Jesus broke bread in the same manner he did in feeding the 5000 and at the Last Supper, they recognize him. Earlier, they were kept from recognizing Jesus. Now, their
eyes “were opened.” Again, the verb is divine passive. God, who earlier kept them from recognizing Jesus, now opens their eyes to see him.

The Italian painter Caravaggio captures the precise moment when the identity of their dinner guest dawns on them. Jesus features prominently in the center of the painting. The innkeeper, to Jesus’ left, seems unaware of what is happening. The two disciples however are dumbstruck. The disciple to the left pushes back in his chair while the disciple on the right extends his arms in sheer wonder and surprise.

Once Jesus reveals his identity, it is mission accomplished and he disappears. Our story closes with the words, “Were not our hearts burning when he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (24:32).

So what does this story have to do with my life? I have three applications from this story to take with you this week.

First, Jesus comes to people in unexpected ways. Repeatedly in Luke’s gospel, Jesus shows up in unexpected places. He shows up at a dinner party for tax collectors and other assorted sinners. He shows up in areas strictly off limits to kosher Jews. He shows up at a storm at sea. He shows up to people afflicted with physical and mental
illness. He will show up in your life if you are open to the possibility.

Even Jesus’ apparent absence is not a real absence. It is only a seeming absence. I would liken his absence to a baby monitor. From the child’s vantage point, parents seem absent, yet it is only a seeming absence. Parents can monitor their child’s well-being from a considerable distance.

I have learned through the years that sometimes God withdraws His presence from me to whet my appetite for Him. God’s seeming absence serves a hidden benefit. It heightens my desire for God. Deprivation has a way of drawing out desire. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Second application: Jesus comes to people who listen to his Word. Go back to verse 32, “Were not our hearts burning within us when Jesus talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (24.32).

The prophet Jeremiah likened God’s Word to fire. “His Word in my heart is like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones” (20:9).

We are about to embark on a new sermon series this summer called *Pressure Points*. We chose the image of a clamp to depict these pressure points. If you really want to know, our initial design had a human head inside a clamp but we decided that it was too graphic. We put the words inside the clamp as a more suitable substitute.
Our focus these next eleven Sundays will be the challenges all of us face in daily life: fear, anxiety, depression, stress, guilt, anger, greed, jealousy, suffering, grief and shame. Tell me you do not find yourself somewhere on this list of life’s pressure points.

There are cards in the pew racks for you to take home today. I invite you to take a card from the pew. You can sign up online to receive these daily devotions via email. Turn to the side where a grid of dates and topics appear. The first date is 6/18—that’s tomorrow, folks. We want you to join us starting tomorrow and continuing right through the summer. This week, the topic is fear. Fear keeps people from God. Fear is faith’s spoil. Negative emotions like fear drive behavior more than thoughts influence behavior. Fear keeps us from recognizing Jesus. We are inviting Christ’s presence and power to replace harmful emotions like fear.

Back to the card. You will see that we have identified a memory verse for you to learn and carry with you this week. This week’s memory verse is Isaiah 41, “Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God.”

There are daily readings to coincide with each day of the week. On Monday, we ask you to read and reflect on the passage that will be the subject of next Sunday’s sermon. On Tuesday through Saturday, we invite you to pray five Psalms on consecutive days as a way to root out fear and deepen faith.

You’ve got to join us in these spiritual practices this summer. It is critical to your spiritual life. There is no better remedy to cure the spiritual blues than to listen for God’s Word to you through Scripture.

meaning. It can refer to the Lord’s Supper or sharing meals with other people.

The relaxed pace of summer is an ideal time to share meals or coffee with spiritual friends. This is the goal behind our summer breakfasts. God mediates His presence as we linger over a meal with trusted friends.

Weekly worship that includes the Lord’s Supper is vital to our spiritual health. What do you do when you don’t feel like coming to worship? You keep coming, that’s all! I keep exercising, whether or not I feel like exercising. I come to worship, whether or not I feel like worshipping.

Whenever I read this heartburn story in Luke 24, the awakening of John Wesley comes to mind. Wesley became leader of a worldwide movement known later as the Methodist Church. Wesley attended worship at a church on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738. The leader that evening was reading from Martin Luther’s Preface to the Romans. Wesley identified the time in his journal as a quarter to nine. The leader was describing the change God works in the heart through faith in Christ. As he was speaking, Wesley later described it this way in his journal: “I felt my heart strangely warmed.” This little flame at a nondescript church in 1738 ignited a firestorm of revival in England and America.

Worship, spiritual friends, listening to God’s Word and prayer lifts me. God can do the same in your life this week.

Lord, set our hearts on fire. Give us holy heartburn. Ignite more passion for you!