

From The Pastor

Sometimes it is hard to see things. At times, the harder we try to see things, the harder they are to see. On a nature walk in the woods, someone might point out in the distance an eagle perched high in a tree. Try as they might, another person in the group will not be able to see the bird because it blends in so well with its surroundings. At times, the term ‘tunnel vision’ is used to describe the inability of a person or a group to see ‘outside the box’, unable to use their imagination to see a familiar thing in a new way.

Grief and the shock of a serious loss is certainly a reasonable excuse for not seeing clearly. I am sure most of us can recall things that we have been told we did or said. On our own, we have no recollection or conscious knowledge of saying or doing such things during a time of stress.

Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus are experiencing a time when it is hard to see clearly. In the depth of shock and grief, they are not able to recognize Jesus, whom they so dearly miss. Beyond the emotional wall that hinders their sight is the reality that they were certain Jesus had been killed. Death is death. They had no hope or expectation that they would ever see Jesus again. In this emotional state, it became impossible to remember and put together all the things Jesus said about rising on the third day, or that he must die and rise again.

Because they never understood, nor wanted to hear about the suffering and death of Jesus, they could not understand that he would rise from the dead. They had no expectation that he could come back from the dead, or would. This was against all the norms of reality and experience. It did not make sense that someone could come back from the dead.

In this perspective, it is no wonder that they failed to recognize Jesus as he walked along the road with them. It is true enough that the eye, at times, cannot see the very thing it is looking at. Only from a new perspective, a new way of seeing can certain realities be known.

This is the challenge and the call to faith upon which the Resurrection depends. The eyes of faith must be opened by the experience of love. In love, truth is more clearly seen. To come to see the truth, that which blocks the eye from seeing must be removed. Jesus allows this to happen for Cleopas and his companion. He approaches the two and smoothly enters their conversation. For Jesus, this is not a moment to teach, but a time to listen. He patiently listens to their fears, hurt, and disappointments. He gains their trust and acceptance as with anyone who finds a listening ear. The two disciples are perhaps relieved to have a third party who will listen to their pain and loss. Having spoken their pain, some of the inner pressure is released.

Now Jesus enters the conversation in an active way. Gently pointing out their blindness, he proceeds to explain all the scriptures that refer to himself and how they explain who he is, and all he was to go through. What a powerful and enticing conversation that must have been! This is later confirmed by the two disciples, ‘were not our hearts burning inside us’.

‘Burning hearts’ is a sign that truth is being spoken. Hearts do not burn easily. In Jesus’ day, and in our own, it takes something deep to stir the heart. We’re not talking juicy gossip or hot information here. This is the kind of burning heart that knows it’s hearing a truth; that a deep inner connection is being made and one better pay attention.

With their hearts ‘rewired’ for hearing and seeing, they don’t want to lose the presence of the One who is speaking to them. They invite him for the evening meal. Burning hearts see things that dull, pained hearts don’t see. Coming to the table, Jesus takes the bread and breaks it, and shares it with his disciples. This familiar action opens their eyes, and they see Jesus for who he is. Discovering Jesus, they also discover or remember who they are: his disciples. On the road, they had given up hope of having a Messiah to follow. They were walking away. Now, in the presence of the risen Lord, they realize their deepest truth as his followers. They return to Jerusalem and rejoin the community who have also encountered Jesus. Love reveals its truth in the One who is Truth. The Son of Man who is risen from the dead unites all who believe in Him.

This story offers us a great deal. Perhaps ‘burning hearts’ is the most effective entry point. Are our hearts burning for the presence of the Lord? With faith in the Resurrection, are we truly able to see and perceive the presence of Jesus in and around us? If not, why not? Perhaps our fears and disappointments have hindered our sight and dulled our desire to trust. The story offers a model of change for this dilemma. Name your fears and disappointments to the Lord, who is always willing to listen. Listen in your heart for the Lord’s gentle reply. Set aside your expectation, letting God show you his way. Be ready to recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Anticipate and expect to know the presence of the Lord at the table of the Eucharist. See Him in the common action of bread and wine made into His Body and Blood. Remember who you are as a follower and believer in Jesus. Burning hearts are not long in waiting to see the risen one.

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