

“The Easter moment: a warming of the heart”

May 8, 2011

Text: 1 Peter 1:17-23, Luke 24:13-35

I.

It’s interesting that here—two weeks on the other side of Easter ... on Mother’s Day—the primary Lectionary Reading for today’s worship (i.e., it’s in bold letters) is this marvelous Easter story from Luke 24.

For me, personally, this is such a revealing, human interaction—so *Christian* to the core, so full of hope and the energy of human love—that I’m always excited to unpack it once more and *give it a go* in a sermon.

What this story unveils—which is so important—is that ...

- While there is always a considerable element of mystery in Easter, still, it’s more than a supernatural event that defies rational understanding.
- It’s more than a belief in something so far-fetched by modern standards of *reasonableness* that you have to check your brain at the door.
- For starters, the story emphasizes the *spiritual* bodily resurrection, rather than the physical.
- And what Luke’s story reveals—too—is the metaphor, the symbolic language that helps make all of our Christian faith more alive and more meaningful.

You see, friends, as *progressive Christians* (that’s what we call ourselves in the *United Church of Christ*) what is so important to emphasize in the second decade of this new century, is that the Christian story of our traditions—of our parents and grandparents, on whose shoulders we always stand—this Christian story is believable.

- It happened, in some way and some form.
- It released a tremendous energy into the world ... an energy which, at its best, has enormous resources to change and transform the world.
- In other words, it’s real ... and to believe it and live it really does make a difference.

II.

Our story this morning in Luke 24 gives us *useful* handles on what Easter is all about. You know the story ... it’s later in the afternoon of that first Easter ...

1. Two of Jesus' followers are returning to their homes in Emmaus, a village some seven miles outside of Jerusalem. For whatever reasons, they have still not experienced the living Christ.
2. Understandably, they're disconsolate and dispirited ... it's been an awful few days. Then, suddenly, Jesus—in spirit—comes near and joins them in their journey. However, *their eyes are kept from recognizing him*.
3. He asks them what they're talking about and they seem stunned at the question: *You mean you don't know all that has happened in these days?*

What do you mean, Jesus replies? And then they tell him all that has happened to Jesus of Nazareth ... and how they all held such high hopes for him ... that he would redeem Israel ... and how their hopes had now been dashed to the ground ...

- and that although some of their women had gone to the tomb ...
 - and his body wasn't there ...
 - and some angels had said he was alive ...
 - and how some of them had gone to the tomb but they didn't see him ... and of course, they were deeply saddened and crestfallen ...
4. About then, Jesus, more than a little frustrated with them, began to explain everything about himself, starting with MOSES and the prophets.
 5. The time just flew by and by the time they were entering the village, they were drawn into the aura of Jesus and his explanation of things ... and so they invited him to stay with them ...
 6. And then, when he was at the table with them, Jesus took break, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them ...

And then, their eyes were opened ... and they recognized him ... and he vanished from their sight.

7. And then they said to each other, *Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking on the road, opening the scriptures to us?*
8. And then, unable to contain their profound joy, they returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven and their companions gathered together ... and they shared with them what had happened ...

III.

Again, in the breaking of the bread, ***Their eyes were opened ...*** and all the while, there was this *warming of the heart* from within.

Friends, that's the Easter moment. This *warming of the heart* from within. That's what happened to the followers of Jesus. And along with the *warming of the heart* came a *bending towards love* in everything.

This *warming of the heart* is life-changing, friends. It's life changing because, in the aura of its warmth, everything in our lives *bends towards love*.

We feel loved ... we feel valued ... we realize that our lives have meaning ... because this *bending towards love* leads us to new relationships and new commitments ...

A warming of the heart ... in response to the gift of life ...