

Community of Christ
Fairbanks Congregation Happenings
May 31, 2006

The theme for this Sunday is “Set Our Hearts on Fire!”

Free to
Invite Him to
Reside in me now and for
Evermore

“The greatest honor we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love.”
The Ragamuffin Gospel – Brennan Manning

On to Emmaus

It was Easter afternoon ... Two of Jesus’ disciples ... a man named Cleopas and another whose name is not given ... left Jerusalem and headed for the village of Emmaus.

Emmaus. There are at least three locations within 20 miles of Jerusalem which claim to be Emmaus. Historical and archaeological evidence is not convincing for any of the sites ... so nobody knows exactly where Emmaus was. And that may be good, for Emmaus may be more of a state of mind than a location. Twenty-five years ago, Frederick Buechner put it this way:

Emmaus can be a trip to the movies just for the sake of seeing a movie, or to a cocktail party just for the sake of cocktails. Emmaus may be buying a new suit or a new car ... or reading a second-rate novel or even writing one. Emmaus may be going to church on Sunday. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred.

“... whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred.”

Those two disciples had just been through the worst days of their lives. As they journeyed, they spoke of the arrest and hasty trial...of Jesus’ appearances before the Sanhedren and Pilate and Herod. They remembered His scarred back and legs ... his bleeding head ... the ugly cross stretched across the pre-Sabbath sky. They remembered the death of the One whom they had hoped would be the Redeemer of Israel.

Their hopes and dreams had been dashed by Friday’s agony. Oh, they had heard the reports which the women had given ... about the tomb being empty. But who could believe such idle tales? After all they were just women. Jesus was dead. He was a wise teacher, but not Israel’s Redeemer, not the Christ of God. And so it was on to Emmaus ... “to wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred.”

We know about shattered hopes.

- We know about that promising, bright, articulate young woman ... whose mind, whose future was ruined by a bad batch of drugs.
- We know about the salesman who lost a major account and later his job because he refused to involve himself in any kind of kickback schemes.
- We know of the family which had made it through the tough years of getting their children raised and married and settled ... and just when they were about to have some time to themselves, the wife has a stroke and is incapacitated.
- Or our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is no way that we can appreciate what they have gone through or what the survivors are experiencing now. Their homes and jobs, their friends and families ... all viscously stolen ... all that is left is a small thread of life.

Shattered Hopes, broken dreams.

As the two disciples continued on their journey, they noticed a stranger who approached them to ask what they were discussing. They were astonished: “You mean you don’t know!!? You haven’t heard about Jesus of Nazareth, who as a prophet and a healer ... who was mighty in deed and word ... who was crucified?” They recited the story, including the report of the women, and they lamented: “We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel.”

They had hoped. Everybody hopes...

“We had hoped...” said the parents of their deteriorating daughter.

“We had hoped...” lamented the wife of the man who had lost his job.

“We had hoped...” cried out those war-ravaged soldiers ...

Remember how gently Jesus treated those Emmaus travelers? He did not berate them for not recognizing Him. He did not criticize them or play on their anxieties. Jesus did not capitalize on their shattered hopes.

Rather Jesus walked with them. Jesus listened carefully to them before he began to teach them what the Scriptures had promised about the Messiah, before He taught them that the suffering and death of Jesus had been foreseen by the prophets of old. That conversation must have lasted hours... perhaps for the rest of the trip.

Maybe that’s why Luke told this story: to remind us that in our darkest moments, on our most lonely journeys, when the world is too much with us ... on the way to Emmaus... that is when Jesus walks with us and listens to us and sets our hearts on fire.. It’s like the old Gospel hymn:

He walks with me and talks with me

And He tells me I am His own;

And the joy we share as we tarry there

None other has ever known.

When the three men reached Emmaus, Jesus appeared to be going on...but the two disciples “constrained him” to stay. They had become buddies on the walk, and as they arrived at their Emmaus, they wanted more time with each other.

We flee when the world is too much with us and head for our Emmaus ... maybe to a place in the woods next door, or to a spot at the coast or in the hills ... and as we travel, as we come closer to Emmaus, whatever stresses which have overwhelmed us begin to fall away.

A woman told me after Early Church today that last week, she was so exhausted after caring for her invalid parent that she was going to the beach for a day. After she got east of Raleigh, the stresses began to wash away and she started singing out loud ... and was so caught up with her singing, that she stopped paying attention to her speed and flashing blue lights pulled her to the side of the road. She did not make any excuses to the officer, but told him the truth, and fortunately he let her go with only a warning.

And there, at the table, the two disciples were already feeling released from their dashed hopes. They were already feeling relieved, ...and Jesus who was still a stranger, “took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them, and their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” In their sharing a simple meal of pita bread, probably along with some vegetable or meat dips and a cup of wine ... their eyes were opened and they saw that the stranger was none other than the Risen Jesus.

Traditionally this text has been interpreted as a Eucharistic text; But on a deeper level, this is about Jesus sharing a meal with other people. This text should be read in light of Middle Eastern Hallelukah, or local law, which says that if you ever break bread with someone ... if you ever eat a meal with another person, you are bound to that person to be a friend for the rest of your life.

Emmaus is not just about Jesus being with those two disciples that Sunday afternoon ... but it's about Jesus being with them for the rest of their lives.

When those men in Emmaus had finished their meal and Jesus had departed, the enormity of His presence came crashing down. “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked...?”

Burning hearts. On fire for Jesus. That is not normal Presbyterian language. We usually do not think of Presbyterians as Burning Heart Christians.

However, we really are. John Calvin, the father of World Presbyterianism, had three symbols on his family crest: three symbols which depicted what he believed to be the most important aspects of the Christian faith.

- There was the **open book**, which symbolized the centrality of Scripture.

- There was the **outstretched hand**, which stood for the Christian's call to reach out to those in need.
- And there was a **burning heart**, a symbol that Christians can experience the fire of the presence of God.

It has always been important that Presbyterian Christians keep a balance between order and ardor, a balance between well-ordered structure and spirit filled excitement. We seem to be a little better at order than we are at the burning hearts. But we all know that we need both sides, for order is empty with out some ardor and ardor is meaningless unless there is some order.

From shattered hopes to burning hearts. While all of us know the brokenness of shattered hopes, the experience of the burning heart may not be so common. However, Emmaus reminds us that our hearts can be ignited in unlikely places, like walking to Emmaus ...at unlikely times like in the midst of despair.

The Gospel of Emmaus says that Jesus Christ is risen...not just on Easter, but forever and ever. Death and shattered hopes are not the last chapter. We do not go to graveyards looking for Jesus, for He is not there. Jesus is with us on our Journeys to Emmaus ... on those lonely roads from shattered dreams. And when our eyes are opened and we know His mysterious presence, our hearts burst into flame and we remember, as did those travelers, "Did not our hearts burn within us???"

God grant that our eyes may be opened in the breaking of bread ... not just at this Table, but at dining room and breakfast room tables, at restaurants and cafés, on picnics or back-yard cook-outs ... as we eat together and share our lives with one another, may our eyes be opened... may we find among ourselves the very presence of the Risen Jesus, and that should set our hearts afire. Amen.

Haywood D. Holderness, Jr

S-1298

Luke 24:13-35

April 3, 2005

Announcements:

Choir practice on Saturdays at the church and make a happy noise.

June 4th - Congregational Conference - 10:00.

July 30th – Aug 4th – Congregational Leaders Workshop – Lamoni, Iowa – See Mission Center or World Church webpage for details.

August 26th and 27th – Witnessing Community seminar. Make plans now to attend this event.

<p>See Mission Center web page for more information</p>
--

April 22- 23rd- Sionito Work Party

May 25th – 29th – Young Adult Reunion – Sionito- Contact Diane Solario.

The following is a schedule of those that are currently scheduled to deliver the message for the 2nd quarter. This is not the “official list” and is for informational purposes only. Please refer to the worship schedule in the fellowship hall for changes.

June 4th - Dick Davies

June 11th – Sue Turner

June 19th – Leo & Carole Caesar

June 24th – David Watson

The nursery schedule cannot be posted in the family center for January through March 2006. Please contact Andrea if you are interested in volunteering in the nursery this quarter.

Nursery Schedule:

We need volunteers for the nursery. Please see Andrea Watson.

Please review the prayer list in the Sunday bulletin. If you have added someone to the list please update Leo Caesar with any new information and current status of the prayer concern. Please contact Leo Caesar if you wish to add/remove someone from the list.

Calendar & Mission Center News:

The Coastal Bend Mission Center is proud to announce that the Coastal Bend web site is up and running! You can visit the site at www.coastalbendmc.org

I will be sending out periodic e-mails letting everyone know what is “HAPPENING” at Fairbanks. Please let me know if your e-mail or other contact information changes.

Mark your calendars and **participate, enjoy, reach out!!!!!!**I pray that everyone have a safe and happy week.

Martha Romig