

Sunday, April 30, 2017

I Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Walking and Talking and Praising God

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! As we continue in our celebration of Christ's resurrection in this season of Easter let us rejoice for Jesus is alive and His Spirit is with us now!

There was a king who decided to set aside a special day to honor his greatest subject. When the big day arrived, there was a large gathering in the palace courtyard. Four finalists were brought forward, and from these four, the king would select the winner. The first person presented was a wealthy philanthropist. The king was told that this man was highly deserving of the honor because of his humanitarian efforts. He had given much of his wealth to the poor.

The second person was a celebrated physician. The king was told that this doctor was highly deserving of the honor because he had rendered faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years. The third person was a distinguished judge. The king was told that the judge was worthy because he was noted for his wisdom, his fairness, and his brilliant decisions.

The fourth person presented was an elderly woman. Everyone was quite surprised to see her there, because her manner was quite humble, as was her dress. She hardly looked the part of someone who would be honored as the greatest subject in the kingdom. What chance could she possibly have, when compared to the other three, who had accomplished so much? Even so, there was something about her the look of love in her face, the understanding in her eyes, her quiet confidence.

The king was intrigued, to say the least, and somewhat puzzled by her presence. He asked who she was. The answer came: "You see the philanthropist, the doctor, and the judge? Well, she was their teacher!" That woman had no wealth, no fortune, and no title, but she had unselfishly given her life to help and encourage others in order that they might become great. She gave of herself in service of others and in love. But the king could not see the value in the humble lady. He missed the significance of the teacher.

Often we miss the value of those around us, those whom we see every day or every week. Maybe we might even be like Cleopas and his brother who did not realize that they were in the presence of Jesus as we walked and talked and praised God for all the events which took place in Jerusalem that week. They did not realize who it was who was walking with them until one moment when the recognition came to them and their eyes were opened.

Two men, most likely brothers, one named Cleopas and the other unnamed were walking home from Jerusalem to the little village of Emmaus about 7 miles. We don't know the exact time they were leaving the city and making their way home would take them about 1 hour 45 minutes to 2 hours by walking at an average speed. On their way home they were talking with each other about what had happened in Jerusalem. As they were talking and walking a stranger came up to them and asked what it was they were discussing. They stopped walking for a moment and then Cleopas asked the stranger if he was just a visitor to the city because he did not know what had happened. They could not believe that this stranger did not know what had happened!

They resumed walking and then told the story of Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet who was crucified. Cleopas told him that many believed that this man was the one who would redeem Israel. They told him about the women who had not seen his body but angels who said he was alive. Some of their companions had gone to the tomb and found it empty but they did not see Jesus.

The stranger then said to his new friends, "how foolish they were and slow of heart they were. Didn't the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? Jesus then began teaching the brothers all what the scriptures had said about the saviour. And as he spoke they kept walking and talking. When they approached the village and home, Jesus, not wanting to impose on these new friends acted as if he were going further. But they urged him to stay as it was evening and would be dark soon. They invited him to eat with them. And when he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to his new friends, something amazing happened. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Jesus then disappeared from their sight.

The brothers then looked at each other and asked whether their hearts were burning as they talked on the road? They knew that this was Jesus- the prophet who died and rose again. And they needed to tell others. So they got up and ran back to Jerusalem and when they found the disciples, they told them, "It is true. The Lord has risen." They told them their encounter with Jesus and their story of how their eyes were opened when he broke the bread for their dinner.

Cleopas and his brother were forever changed because they believed in Jesus and while walking home were filled with joy at hearing that Jesus was alive. Jesus had told them the significance of the promised Messiah and he taught them about what the scriptures said about

the Christ. But they did not recognize him until he broke the bread before them. A simple act of sharing and generosity, but it was at this moment that Cleopas and his brother knew who the stranger was and they were in awe. Not only for his teachings but his humility as they had shared their story of the events of Jesus in Jerusalem.

After experiencing Jesus in a close way, they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. They wanted others to know that Jesus was alive as they had seen him and listened to him and shared a meal with him. Even though could not recognize them there was something they knew about Jesus that they had to share. He was alive and so they ran the 7 miles back to the city and told the Eleven.

Many questions come to mind and may bring about what we are to do because we believe Jesus is alive. These two disciples were just walking home after a very busy week. They had seen the teacher, the healer, the Lord be tried, beaten and crucified. They knew he had been buried and they had grieved with their close friends. But this day, they are laughing and talking and rejoicing in each other's company. That is until the stranger met up with them, walked with them and shared in their lively discussions about the Jerusalem events.

Why didn't they know it was Jesus? He had scars on his hands and feet, but while they were talking and walking these were covered in dirt so that they could see him and not the wounds. Jesus wanted to listen to what the word was like on the street and he heard the excitement in the voices and eyes of these men. He could have revealed himself in Jerusalem but did not. He only hid them because he wanted to hear their story and where they were in their faith about Jesus as Saviour. He needed to know what they knew and how they knew. Jesus was checking upon the communication links taking place that night and the morning! And he wanted to know without causing a big commotion.

Have you ever been in a similar situation where you had been informed of something exciting to come for your place of business and could not talk about it? What about something for your family? I can only imagine what Jesus was thinking when he heard the excitement in the men's voices. He could have revealed himself right then and there. But he seemed frustrated to think that they did not realize that the Christ had to suffer death and then enter his glory. He wanted them to understand the purpose of the Christ and explained through the scriptures what God had planned for the messiah. He wanted them to know the saviour's

purpose and then reveal who he was. Jesus was still teaching them but they did not recognize him. But once they did, they realized that they should have known it was Jesus.

They asked each other, “were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened up the scripture?” How come we didn’t know him? Their hearts were burning within. Were they questioning their faith or growing in belief of Christ? Or were they simply looking at Jesus from their point of view and not fully understanding what it means to live out and have an explicit and fruitful faith in the living Christ who was amongst them. Did these brothers feel something that wasn’t there before? And was this ‘something’ the Holy Spirit?

These men were led by the Spirit to get up and run back to Jerusalem which probably took them at least an hour to run. The sun was going down and yet they felt called to go and see the disciples to tell them about their experience with the Risen Christ.

How many of you have received news—good or bad- which you know you just have to pass on to another person? With today’s technology we can text, twitter, email and even pick up the phone to share information but do we share those moments with others which have caused our hearts to burn when there has been a questioning, challenging and fruitful expression of faith?

I have heard people tell me stories of God has touched their lives; how prayer has changed them- enabling them to become well again, to overcome sadness and loneliness, to build up confidences..... But then I ask—if this is what you believe has happened, I then ask have you told someone else about your experience of God? Just think about this for a moment.

We are gathered here and if we allow the quietness and the movement of the Spirit to tug at our hearts even in these next few moments, how will you respond? Cleopas and his brother were in the presence of the Living Jesus and they realized later that there was a burning within. This was their faith being challenged. Their questions were answered by Jesus and they responded by running and telling the disciples what they had experienced. They weren’t afraid—they ran and the disciples listened. They had seen the Risen Christ and their lives were changed!

When we experience the Spirit of God our lives change- we are no longer led by what we want, but it is what the spirit calls us to do. When our hearts are burning or strangely warmed, this is indication of an Easter power- the give of the Risen Christ within us. With this

we are renewed in our faith because of the promise of resurrection and new life. There is no need to fear death and love is stronger than hatred and peace is indeed a possibility.

I pray that your hearts will be warmed by God's Spirit because of the Risen Christ! May your faith grow and hopefully you can get excited about Jesus' resurrection! Envision those brothers on the road- running to tell their story. Envision yourself—sharing your experience of how Christ's Spirit speaks to you and calls you to live. You might also, walk and talk and praise God giving thanks for His Spirit in your life. Amen.