

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^[b]¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us^[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

"That same day" referred to in the Gospel is **EASTER DAY**. Two disciples (not apostles, but disciples) of Jesus were headed out of town. Cleopas, and another disciple whose identity is not revealed by name, gender, or birthplace, are headed out of Jerusalem to a little town called Emmaus – SEVEN MILES AWAY. They are saddened, ... no disconsolate. Their friend, leader, and rabbi, Jesus, who they later describe as a "*Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*" has been put to death by the religious and civil authorities.

The "Emmaus Walk" story is so powerful, that many have come to a new and profound relationship with Jesus Christ, through this story. And they pass that along to others in *Walk to Emmaus weekends*. We have several veterans of that experience in this sanctuary today.

Cleopas and the other could not identify Jesus when He came alongside them and walked with them, until the breaking of bread, when their eyes suddenly was opened, and their vision improved.

Having one's eyes opened is a powerful description used through the Bible, from the Garden of Eden forward. I've listed some examples in the tear off tab of the bulletin, in case you'd like to look at them later at home.

But, today, I want us to look at what was going on BEFORE THEIR EYES WERE OPENED.

To this unrecognized stranger, the disciples remembered Jesus for his **reputation**; they remembered Him as a **victim**; they remembered Him as a **failure**. And now they certainly remembered him as **a dead man**. Like Sergeant Joe Friday, of Dragnet fame, they had "***all the facts, ma'am, just the facts.***"

But they did NOT have the **VISION**.

Like Baalam, as retold in the children's story, they had all the facts before them, BUT their eyes were not opened.

They are just like folks who sit in Church and in Sunday School, and in all kinds of special Bible study classes, who HAVE LOTS OF KNOWLEDGE **ABOUT** JESUS, BUT WHO DO NOT SEE HIM IN FRONT OF THEIR VERY FACE.

To borrow from the Gospel of Thomas (Sayings) not yet included in all Bibles, but certainly studied by some Bible scholars with the same intensity as though it were: **KNOW WHAT IS IN FRONT OF YOUR FACE AND THAT WHICH IS HIDDEN FROM YOU WILL BE REVEALED UNTO YOU.**

Ironic, isn't it, that we quote today from Thomas, who we heard last week also had a vision problem? BUT, and that's a big BUT, ***once vision is received, amazing things can happen.***

We have a tendency to jump to the end of this story and see how their eyes were opened in the breaking of bread. We folks of the Methodist tradition believe that there is all that power and more in the breaking of bread of Holy Communion.

Certainly the Gospel writer believed that this was a post-Resurrection repetition of the Last Supper, when he used the same four verbs used in every Biblical telling of Jesus' sacramental breaking of bread: he **“took, blessed, broke, and gave [the bread.]”**

We people called Methodist believe there is so much power in this that we open the Lord's Table to everyone, for that Grace comes from God, through Jesus, not from any membership, or prior recitation of vows, by the recipient of Communion Grace.

But, today before we go to the Lord's Table, let's look at what preceded the opening of their eyes. **What came in between** them (and us) having only a vision of the **FACTS OF THE FIVE SENSES WORLD** and the **VISION OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?**

First, and Cleopas and his friend recognized this themselves (verse 32): **THEIR HEARTS WERE BURNING** when they delved into the scriptures with Jesus. Certainly reading of scripture in the presence of Jesus is important for us.

But I want you to note the process: **Hearts burning lead to eyes seeing.** [repeat: **Hearts burning lead to eyes seeing.**] That process is important for us to be able to understand how **SPIRITUAL VISION** works.

Normal physiological vision of **“just the facts, ma'am”** works with light **OUTSIDE** the body shining on an object, and that light shining through the lens of our eye and back through the optic nerve, to the brain, to give us the image. It's an image of the **FACTS OF THE FIVE SENSES WORLD**.

SPIRITUAL VISION operated when **A LIGHT BURNS INSIDE THE HEART AND POWERS UP THROUGH THE EYES** allowing us to see what is in front of our face, that is more than just the objects of the **FIVE SENSES WORLD**.

Think of **SPIRITUAL VISION** as being like the **headlights on a car**, where the power comes from the battery, passes through the headlights, and illumines the objects in front of the car.

This **BURNING OF THE HEART** is not something that happens in a moment. It takes time. Luke says it was about **SEVEN MILES WORTH OF TIME**.

About 21 years ago, when he was still a relatively new bishop, S. Clifton Ives came to my seminary and preached a sermon on this Gospel text. He told about the day of his father's funeral. After the funeral, Clif Ives took off his suit and put on his running shoes. He ran around the big lake nearby. He said that it was near the end of that run, when he was able to see beyond just the **FIVE SENSES WORLD KNOWLEDGE** of his father's death. He was given a Vision of sublime quality – an opening of the Kingdom of Heaven right there in front of his face.

Bishop Ives told us seminarians then that he realized that the circumference of the lake, which had just run, was just about 7 miles, just about as far as it is from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It takes more than a momentary passing nod to Jesus for your heart to burn, to power up the spiritual vision necessary to see the world of the Kingdom of Heaven that is in front of our eyes. It takes time in solitude with Jesus.

Secondly, we are told (in verse 29) that the disciples asked Jesus to stay. Jesus never breaks down the door and forces His way into our hearts. We must invite Jesus to stay.

If we are going to experience the TRUTH that supercedes the FACTS of the FIVE SENSES WORLD, we have to be willing to invite Jesus to stay with us.

One of the best examples I know of this is a young woman that many of you know, by the name of Ma'tha Elizabeth (aka Betty) Rogers. She has told several of us how when she sits down in her prayer chair in her living room, of her apartment at the retirement home, that Jesus is always on the couch beside her. He's there because she spends time with Him, and because she has invited Him to stay. She will also tell you that some days she has a notion of what He wants to talk about, and she will put her hand to her eye (like a horse's blinder), and say, "I don't want to talk to You about *THAT* today." But, she always relents, and hears Him out. Because she did, after all, invite Him to stay.

When we have this kind of SPIRITUAL VISION we are **not limited to seeing just the painful facts all around us.**

When we are gifted with this SPIRITUAL VISION, we are able to have **one foot in the WORLD OF FIVE SENSES, and one foot in the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN that is IN FRONT OF OUR FACE.**

Oh ... and one last thing ... how do you know when you've got it? I think it's going to be self-evident in your life. But others will know, because, like Cleopas and the other disciple, you don't keep it a secret. You get up, get out the door, and **go tell others.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.