

The Stranger Who Brought Heartburn Luke 24:13-35

Daily we encounter conversations with strangers. Our trips to the grocery store, answering the telephone, or even coming to church can warrant seeing and talking to at least one stranger. Many of these conversations involve a simple "hello" or smile as we share a friendly greeting. Then, there are those cordial conversations with acquaintances, where we talk about general chit chat or whether we really need a new hospital. Are acquaintances really strangers? Many would not classify church folks as total strangers, but do we really know what the person next to us really believes about Christ's resurrection? Are they doubters? Strangers, whether or not you know them, bring a unique perspective to our lives.

The time has arrived for us to discover what others believe to be true about Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection. We are to be called by God to seek the truth so we, too, can believe and trust God. There's a question that keeps coming to my mind with our text today. Why was it important for Jesus to appear as a stranger? The spiritual answer to this question is, "Because Christ can be found in strangers as well as friends;" but is there more? As we begin our search for the truth about Jesus, we are

lead to a community of people whom we believe to be the most knowledgeable about Jesus; the Christians or church people. By the way, thanks to John Wesley, you are one of those church people. John Wesley created small groups called bands, classes, and societies where people could come to learn about God and become new disciples to help those searching to understand Christianity.

In our text for today, the Christian community was just being formed. It was three days after Jesus died on the cross and was laid in the tomb. The women had come to finish preparing Jesus' body for final burial but they found an empty tomb with the angels proclaiming Christ was alive. The Passover celebration had come to an end; word of the empty tomb quickly spread as the followers of Jesus prepare to return home. There were many skeptics who refuse to believe Jesus was alive until they saw Jesus themselves. Luke continues the story with two men walking home from Jerusalem where the Passover celebration turned into a time of mourning for their friend Jesus.

Cleopas and his friend were walking home to Emmaus when a stranger approached asking what they were talking about. How odd? A total stranger walks up, as though they were long lost friends, wanting to

join the conversation. The men stopped in their tracks, grief stricken from the week's events; suddenly they were taken aback by the rudeness of this stranger. Cleopas, a kind gentle soul, asked if this stranger was new to the area. It was obvious this man had not been to any of the events of the Passover in Jerusalem. Cleopas and his friend shared the story of Jesus, the great prophet, and the Israelite's hope of redemption through Jesus' life. Now their sadness revealed how the Religious leaders had destroyed their only hope of seeing the Messiah face to face. They had put all their faith in one earthly human being which was now dead. They failed to believe there was more to Jesus than just being a great prophet. Did they not listen when Jesus said he would soon die; but he wouldn't stay dead? It's interesting to me how these men, who seem to know Jesus well, failed to apply what they had been taught by the prophets to the current events of the week. But then, I asked myself, have I been connecting what I have been taught about Jesus to my life today? What prophecy is yet to be fulfilled and how will I know it has been fulfilled?

Jesus was also amazed that these men had forgotten what the prophets said about His life. Therefore, Jesus, the stranger, spent the rest of the journey reminding them what the prophets had written. At their

arrival to Emmaus, these men still were not totally convinced that Jesus was really the Messiah. Then, Jesus, the stranger, acted as though he was going further on his journey; but was stopped by Cleopas and his friend who invited Him to their home for a hot meal and a night of rest. The stranger agrees; but when this guest broke the bread for the meal, Cleopas and his friend realized it was Jesus that had been walking with them all along. They even comment, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?" Talk about heart burn, WOW! Their ears heard the words, their minds listened to the wonderful history lesson, but their hearts neglected to invite Jesus, the Messiah (God's Son) to live in them. Have you been experiencing a little heart burn lately?

In our society today, heartburn is generally something we can't wait to get rid of so we can feel better. However, in the spiritual world, heart burn occurred when we forget to apply what we've learned about God. God has this way of getting our attention through an aching in our soul. Sometimes this is a longing to know more about God. Other times it can be a thought that keeps coming into your heart and mind calling for some kind of action. For example, occasionally, I get the name of a person in

my head that won't go away. It is then I make a contact either by phone, in person, or through email. Generally, that person has something going on in their lives that they need to talk through or just need to be reminded God loves them. These two men traveling to Emmaus were in need of a reminder that Jesus had risen from the dead and truly was the Messiah. They needed to know God had not forgotten them. Are there people who need to be reminded that they still belong to God? Are you one who yearns to see Christ's face?

Today, we come to gather at this table to have Christ revealed to us. This meal offers us a place in God's heavenly kingdom, but it also offers us the opportunity to be the stranger who brings heart burn to others. When we partake of this meal God's blessing comes to us as the body and blood of Christ; broken and shed for us. It is our assignment, then, to become the body and blood of Christ for the world. We take on the role of the stranger who shares the stories of the prophets and the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for those who have lost their hope. Cleopas and his friend discovered their hearts burning and they ran to tell the news. There are strangers in our midst sharing the good news with us.

Let us break bread together to discover what will be revealed about Christ that we can share with the rest of the world. Amen.