

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Psalm 116:10-17
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

As I read the Gospel story in preparation for today, what really struck me is how these two disciples, fleeing Jerusalem and going to a nearby village, encounter God in two very familiar ways.

Jesus appears, though “their eyes were kept from recognizing him”. They do not immediately perceive his presence. Yet there is something they recognize as the conversation progresses. Though they do not make the connection at first, afterwards, in hindsight, they describe with powerful language, how their “hearts were burning within” them as Jesus spoke with them. And it was not just any conversation – Jesus opened the words of Scripture to them, and their hearts felt and knew something their eyes and minds did not yet comprehend.

They encountered God through Holy Scripture.

Next, they reach Emmaus, they ask Jesus to stay with them - “Abide with us, for night is falling and we do not know where to go” - to borrow the King James translation. Jesus stays, and they share a meal.

And in that meal, a hauntingly familiar thing happened. Jesus took bread. He blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples. Even as I say these words now I can *feel* the Eucharistic Prayer we will say in a few minutes. Jesus just did this, three days earlier with his disciples, saying, “Take, Eat, this is my Body. Do this in remembrance of me.”

So these two disciples encounter God a second way - in bread and wine. In fellowship. In Communion.

They encounter God in Scripture, then they encounter God in the Eucharistic meal – in the Breaking of the Bread.

Doesn't it give you chills, just a little bit, when you think of how our Sunday worship is patterned off the encounter with the Risen Christ on the Road to Emmaus?

Or perhaps Jesus came to those two disciples in that way because it is the pattern of our Sunday worship. The opening of Scripture, and the Breaking of Bread.

We have just heard the words of Scripture. The preaching of St. Peter in Acts, calling on the people of Jerusalem to accept the love of God – the promise of God's salvation “for you, for your children, and for all who are far away”.

We said the words of Scripture in the psalm, and spoke of “lifting up the cup of salvation” and of “offering to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” We heard in St. Peter's letter the call to “trust in God” and “love one another deeply from the heart”

We heard Jesus' own words in the Gospel, as he explained what the Messiah really is, how he is glorified through his weakness and his suffering, as these two disciples were about to finally understand, when they finally encountered the reality of Resurrection.

God is here this morning speaking many words of hope to us in His Word of Holy Scripture.

A priest from my church back home in Illinois sometimes says this about Scripture. He says, “The Bible, Holy Scripture, is the only book that heals you as you read it.”

The first time I heard this, I thought “Huh,” and wondered if that were true, or made sense. But I have found it an incredible thing to say to myself before I open the Bible. Sometimes just saying that causes me to look at the words of Scripture in a totally different light. But I think what it most causes to happen for me, is that it makes me observe my heart as I read or listen.

I look inwards, even as I read, when I have said this phrase before I start – “the Holy Scripture is the only book that heals you as you read it” – I look inwards at my heart and try to detect whether it is healing.

And you know, something is happening in there. Sometimes it’s small. Sometimes infinitesimally small. Sometimes it’s not small at all – sometimes it hits you in the heart like a 2x4.

If I don’t say that phrase before I read Scripture sometimes I don’t think I feel anything at all. But when I do say it, I pay attention, and I may be able to detect a little tiny . . . glow, a little smoldering, of my heart burning within me as the Scriptures are opened to me.

In some Eastern Orthodox liturgies, there is this most amazing phrase during the Gospel procession. Here in the Episcopal Church we announce the Holy Gospel according to the saint who wrote that Gospel account, and then we begin. But in these orthodox liturgies there comes a moment when the priest holds up the Gospel book and says (well, sings) this: “Wisdom! Be attentive!”

Perhaps we should all start doing that! Perhaps that would help us to be attentive to our hearts, and to remember that we are encountering God every time the Scriptures are opened. And that encounter in Scripture helps us come to the next great encounter, just as it happened next for the disciples travelling to Emmaus – the encounter with God in the Breaking of the Bread.

In the prayer book, on page 834, there is a prayer for use “Before receiving Communion” – often it is used by clergy, acolytes, and others before Sunday worship begins. You could use it before communion today – page 834. The prayer says this:

“Be present, be present, O Jesus, our great High Priest, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.”

In this prayer we repeat the very words of Luke chapter 24 verse 35, asking God to help us recognize at the Holy Communion, though our eyes and hearts often fail to see, that the Risen Christ is present with us here, *as he was present with his disciples* in the Breaking of the Bread.

He is here – his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – fully, really with us when we receive the host and drink from the cup. Reminding us of Resurrection, of the life and hope God has won and given to us. We pray that we may see and know this and recognize him when the bread is broken for us here today.

We pray that we might recognize that God offers himself once more to us here. He pours himself out for us in the chalice, and in that Sacrament we experience him pouring himself out for us on the cross. He offers all there is to give to us, and we have but to reach out our hands and receive it.

Holy Communion is the proof of what Grace is – the unearned, unmerited favor of God – the love of God offered freely to us though our eyes and hearts struggle to even recognize it. It is God sprinting to be with us while we are still far away. It is God coming to stay with us, to abide with us, so that nothing need make us afraid anymore, so that even death loses its sting, so that we share in God’s incredible triumph over hate and fear and death.

And that is why we gather in worship Sunday after Sunday, to live out this pattern once more. To encounter God speaking to us in his Word – in Holy Scripture. To encounter God present with us in the Word made flesh and blood through bread and wine – in Holy Communion. To awaken our hearts, and try to recognize, even for a moment, the way they burn within us when the Living God reaches out his hand, walks beside us, and enters into our very selves.

Amen.