**Third Sunday of Easter, Year A UPMP Morgan Park, April 26, 2020 UPMP**

**Grace and peace from United Protestant Church of Morgan Park, Duluth, MN.**

***…Where Spring is returning with the greening and the birds and change in light and lengthening of days… But we’ve had a wind off the lake that has kept us in the grip of chill— hey, a recommendation—if you’re able to do so, just head south a bit. Head down for an hour or so and, say, drive by the St. Croix River, or Crex Meadows—just off that lake it it’s so much warmer. I got the kids out there and we are in shorts and sandals.***

***…ah, but “we like it here”…as we say.***

***And we like you here! At church! For those tuning in that may not be the usual suspects—welcome…and I hope you feel welcome—give a call, send a note.***

***And for those “usual suspects” –I’m just gonna say it: I miss you!***

***I mean it! --Of all the things that this time has taught me, at the center is how good and life-giving and holy it is to be close to one another, sharing time and space. It’s not the “idea” of church, it’s the shared practice of being church.***

***It reminds me that I’m not a minister just for the ideology of it. I’m a minister for the amazing human souls I have the privilege of sharing faith and life with.***

***Friends, we’ll be back, with vim and vigor… …what is “vim” anyway?***

***I’m guessing Latin… in any event, I pray you have some “vim” or that this time together may provide for you some vim, and that you can share it all around… and welcome it from others.***

***So with vim we begin…***

**It is the Third Sunday of Easter in Lectionary Year A… and we’re engaging Resurrection.**

**(That’s a vague phrase, let’s put it in context) in the narratives, we spent the season before Lent appreciating Jesus as teacher and prophet and divine gift—as Messiah, then into Lent, where we walk with Jesus and the disciples toward Jerusalem… and the Passion Story. Good Friday… Easter.**

**And now we linger on Easter. So here’s our story, from Luke today.**

**SCRIPTURE**

**Luke 24:13-35**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. 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?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

SERMON: HELP US TO SEE!

Let me begin with a line in that scripture in Luke: “*Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures*.”

Oh friends… how I want that!

How I want to be with those two disciples, walking that road to the village Emmaus and hearing those words! I mean… how it’s written in the text! “He…(Jesus himself!) *interpreted the things about himself in all the Scriptures!”* …Wouldn’t that just be the coolest of the cool?

…but friends, we don’t have those words. Many of the Gospels make some of the links…or we make the links, often found in the footnotes of our Study Bibles—but the thing is: even with those words, all was not “clear” to those disciples. They did not see. The scripture reads that when Jesus appeared beside them: “their eyes were prevented from seeing him” and even after that beautiful walk and that wisdom from the man himself, they didn’t see.

What did it take? Fellowship. Table fellowship. Kindness. The disciples offer this stranger—wise and faithful stranger, to be sure, but still stranger—their hospitality…to come and stay with them at that late hour.

And it was when Jesus took the bread and blessed and broke it… that’s when their eyes were opened. That’s when they could see him.

Information, fact, busy little detail… friends to this day, those things can blind us…can keep us from seeing.

I was looking at some notes from six years ago when I sat with this text in a bible study with different church. We were asking this same question: *“how were their eyes prevented from seeing him?” …*and friends, I played a little mean trick on them back then--(kind of like the April Fool’s joke of painting the church bright pink—sorry about that… ok not really, it was pretty funny—and by the way, there is no second letter of Paul to Galatia in the Bible, I made that up because it didn’t feel right to quote real scripture for false intent)—anyway: I told this group in Bible Study: *Light is often mentioned in scripture—and it all has to do with the continuum of the wavelengths of light. Jesus harnessed his capacity to access, and dwell within an alternate wavelength of light beyond than those that our eyes are capable of seeing—whether it was infared or ultraviolet, scientists have yet to determine.*

Their response? “Get outta here!” They called my bluff. And I’m glad they did.

Friends, intellect won’t get you to God. The disciples say to each other as an afterthought: *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"* and I want to say “yes! but you were so lost in your head full of busy little details that you couldn’t trust the burning in your heart!”

That “burning in your heart” is was Jesus is all about. “It is what God so loved the world and gave his only begotten son” is all about! As that next verse, John 3:17 says “not to condemn the world, but to save it!”

“Were not our hearts burning?…”

There’s a sweet bit of prose from Eduardo Galeano in his great work “The Book of Embraces”—where he shares this story (here translated from the Spanish):

*Diego had never seen the sea. His father, Santiago Kovadloff, took him to discover it. They went south. The ocean lay beyond high sand dunes, waiting.*

*When the child and his father finally reached the dunes after much walking, the ocean exploded before their eyes. And so immense was the sea and its sparkle that the child was struck dumb by the beauty of it.*

*And when he finally managed to speak, trembling, stuttering, he asked his father:*

*"Help me to see!"*

“Help me to see” *…*Diego…that child in wonder… is not asking for help to visually *comprehend* what was there, but to take it all in…

Isn’t that what we’re doing now, friends? Church together? The faithful gathering?

It is not Jesus’s teaching of how his life and ministry can be justified in all the scripture beforehand that gets the space and attention of this passage, it is when he is in fellowship with them, blessing and breaking bread.

Do we understand it completely? No. But we understand what it means to have our hearts burning in the presence of Christ, and we share that…anytime we can! Sundays in church to be sure, but sitting at those tables in fellowship, or phone calls and greetings, or prayers with and to and for one another. We say “we are the people who know what it is to have our hearts burn in faith” and we will gather and share and celebrate all of that good God grace with one another.

In fact, maybe I can go so far to say that if—if those shared burning hearts—are not the center of the church, well then, we are just spinning our wheels in aimless ritual or tradition and intellectual and theological exercises…

In fact, to name the shadow here, often when we center our lives with Western intellect, or center solely on familiar ritual or tradition…often, what we don’t understand, or doesn’t fit our way of processing things… we are afraid of.

…and often what we are afraid of? We demonize.

We do that with people that are different from us to be sure…label them in a group and set them aside as the other… in effect dehumanizing them…if not demonizing them.

Want to witness systemic evil in our world? See what happens when we dehumanize another human soul.

Different cultures, practices, customs, ways of living, religions and values… if we lead only with our intellect and find they do not fit—we shun them, and often wind up calling them “evil”.

A number of years ago, on the back from a trip out west, my family stopped at Devil’s Tower in South Dakota… and I was enraptured. I mean it. Now, I know I’m a pretty tender fellow, and have a soft shell when it comes to spiritual and emotional stimuli—and I thank God for that, for I feel it has made my life more beautiful—but I had just travelled the mountains of Colorado, played in the waterfalls, wondered at the grandeur and was still knocked senseless by an energy there that I cannot explain.

So there’s my Eliot, climbing all around the boulders and freaking me out, and in the midst of me saying “careful!” he asks me: “Why do they call it ‘Devils Tower’?”

And I responded…in one of those moments in parenting that I can only describe as grace—you know, where you do or say the right thing and you have no idea where you got it from—I responded without hesitation: “People used to use the word “Devil” for anything they couldn’t understand.”

…And I believe that.

I had the same thing recently with someone I did not know well warning me against doing yoga. I’m thinking: the practice of calming my mind and becoming aware of my body to keep it limber and healthy, well fear of that just prompts me to feel empathy. I’m sorry that it makes you afraid, because it is some of my best prayer time I have, and one of the healthiest things I do for this body that I often do not treat very well… But still today it is described as “evil” by some people because it’s different. From a different religious tradition than Christianity.

Friends, it is a good reminder that our Christian call is not to share ideology… it is to share love. It is to share our burning hearts. We share fellowship and break bread together…sing together…pray together and pray for --and receive prayer from-- one another.

And it’s not a singular moment: I wrote in my weekly Friday reminder about a difficult time and the moments, now, years later, how there were moments when I felt my heart burning, even in the midst of that difficult time. A rainbow. A kind person at a car dealership. Kind souls opening their home to me or welcoming me into their lives…

I think of all the grace, even in the midst of a difficult time, and ask: wasn’t God there? Every step of the way?

Yeah…I know… it’s not always that easy to see. I’m here to tell you that I missed it a-plenty o’times.

But it was there… in many shapes and souls and colors—whether my thick head knew it or not, and it’s important that when we do feel it, we share it with one another, and that when we do not feel it, we welcome others sharing.

It’s the message Jesus teaches us here in the Gospel this morning…it is the message of resurrection. Share our hearts on fire with Jesus.