

Go to Emmaus!

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

I don't know if the world gives enough credit to Christians. Christians started many things we take for granted. For example, I am hard pressed to think of a hospital or nursing home that was not started by Christian organizations.

Here is another example, education. Already in the ancient Roman Empire, Christians began to teach the poor how to read and write at a time when only the rich could learn. And they did something really radical. They also taught girls. Christian missionaries often found people who had no written language so they invented alphabets and writing, places like Russia, Germany and in America for the Apaches and Navajo. Martin Luther kept insisting that the princes and rulers start public schools so farmers, peasants, even girls could learn to read and write. In America the first public school system was started by the church. Most of our public universities were started by churches, schools like Harvard, Yale and the University of Michigan. The first school for the blind was started by a pastor. Christian missionaries started schools in places like Africa and India.

Why? So we people can read the Bible. It is that simple. And why is it so important? Our text for today gives us the answer to that. Let's go on a journey this morning to the village of Emmaus. As we do, we will see Jesus open up the Bible for us and then how that Bible lights our hearts on fire.

I. Let Jesus open up the Bible for you.

Boy, did we have a cloudy, cold and rainy week. You probably wondered where the sun went. The sun didn't go anywhere. It was there the whole time. We were just too busy staring at the clouds to notice it. That's how these two disciples felt in our text. It is Easter, the happiest day ever. The sun was shining. Jesus is alive. But they couldn't see past the clouds. So Jesus appeared to them.

“He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.””

These two disciples were depressed. *“... we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”* Note their sad use of the past tense; Jesus was a prophet, not is. They had hoped, but that hope was gone. Jesus died. It is interesting they noted that it was the third day; they knew something big was to happen on the third day, and something did. The women all testified that angels appeared to them and that they said Jesus was alive. But they couldn't see this past their depression.

“He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Here is my handy definition of a fool. A fool is someone who ignores the obvious. If the stove burner is red hot, the fool would place his hand on it. These disciples were fools because they ignored the obvious. The answer had been right there before their very eyes. No, it was the risen Jesus standing before them; remember Jesus kept his identity secret. The answer had been in their Bibles all the time. And he began with Genesis and worked his way through the prophets, showing how everything had to happen just as it did.

Yes, it would have been neat to hear Jesus. What passages did he quote? But guess what? We have already. Every Sunday God opens up his Word and he tells us these things. But we so often are foolish. Just think of all the troubles and sad moments we can avoid if we only had a better knowledge of what the Bible says and a firmer trust in it.

But that is why Jesus takes us to Emmaus. Confirmands, you are finishing up three years of confirmation classes. By my count we have, this year alone, opened up our Bibles and studied 403 Bible passages and 19 Bible stories. I made you memorize 48 of them this year alone, and you memorized the Small Catechism twice in the past three years. And all of this is in addition to the number of times the Bible was opened up to you in Sunday School, each Sunday worship services and in family and personal devotions.

Why? Of course, it is God's Word. When God speaks, we should stop and listen. But more importantly, so you look beyond the clouds of this world and see the Son of God shining. We did this so your hearts will be set on fire.

II. Let the Bible set your heart on fire.

I am yet to meet someone who believes in Jesus who never read or heard about the Bible. That is because the Bible doesn't tell us only about Jesus. It is what ignites our hearts on fire.

"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?""

You know what, if I saw a cat stand up on its hind legs and ask me, "What time is it?" I would be astonished. I would say to you, "Did you see that?" Remember, Jesus kept his identity hidden from these two disciples. At dinner he revealed himself and instantly disappeared from their sight! But what was their first reaction? It wasn't, "Did you see that!" It was about the Bible study he conducted with them.

Now we know what it means to live by faith and not by sight. Now we know why Jesus kept his identity hidden and opened instead the Bible. Mom or dad or grandma or a child has died. We know they will rise to eternal life not because we have seen it happen to someone else, but because God promises us, ***"He who believes will not perish but have eternal life."***

It is God's Word that catches our hearts on fire, not some miracle we have seen. The Bible isn't just a loose collection of chapters and verses. It flows together, one verse into another, because it has only one author, the Lord. It also has only one theme, how much God loves the world and how he gave up his son for it.

Now we have an idea of the Bible study Jesus led that day. The Bible takes us from God's perfect creation to the Fall and sin and death and hell. But it walks us through God's plan to save us, the seed of the woman who will come and undo the devil's work. The Old Testament shows how God kept that promise alive. It takes us to the manger in Bethlehem and the wonder of God made flesh, how he had to be handed over to suffer and die, and then rise again on the third day. It shows us that Christ ascended into heaven and is coming back to judge the world and take us believers to heaven forever. Sounds like the Apostle's Creed doesn't it, but that is the one theme, the purpose of the Bible.

Now we can see beyond the clouds of this world to the Son shining. No wonder Paul had the boldness to call any trouble we have now light and momentary compared to the glory that awaits. No wonder John prayed at the end of Revelation, ***"Come quickly, Lord Jesus."*** That's why their hearts were on fire. That's why our hearts burn. Now we have hope. We are saved. We see our own graves opening up and the Son of Man taking us home to heaven.

They had to share this with their fellow disciples. They instantly got up and traveled the seven or so miles on foot back to Jerusalem to share this good news with the others. Remember, it is still Easter. The other disciples were locked in a room. The Emmaus disciples explained all that happened and then suddenly Jesus appeared and said, ***"Peace be with you."***

You are a handsome confirmation class. You are dressed up so nice in your white robes and red flowers. Notice that we are using red and white as our colors today. We use white because you are as holy as Jesus Christ before God because he suffered and died. His blood washes you clean of all the guilt of your sins. And the red? It is the color of fire. In a few moments you will stand and make an open and public confession of your faith, a faith that comes from hearts set on fire by the news of Jesus in God's Word. Of course I will remind you to keep that fire burning. As you need to add more wood to keep a fire alive, you will need more of God's Word.

But I want you to let that fire and your confession tell others about Jesus. I need to hear and see you talk about Jesus; it will encourage me. Your fellow members will need it and your children and grandchildren. But there are strangers who have no idea what kind of hope lives in you. It is a shame, isn't it, if we can't take them to Emmaus and let Jesus open up his Word and light their hearts on fire. Emmaus isn't just a one day trip. It is your life. INJ Amen.