

Trust Your Burning Heart

A Meditation for Easter Sunrise

Text: Luke 24: 13-35

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Do you think we could possibly be the sort of people who might miss Easter if it popped up before our very eyes? It can happen, honestly, and quite easily, even if we are wide awake.

We just heard a story from Luke's gospel about exactly that. On the first Easter Evening, two of the disciples were on the road again when they found themselves walking with a stranger. They must have looked at one another because they began talking to one another, now the three of them. The stranger asked a few things and they responded. It probably all sounded vaguely familiar. One has to wonder why they didn't recognize that it was Jesus himself, back from the other side, walking with them on the road to Emmaus.

It's not all that unusual. Sometimes we don't see the moments of our lives for what they are. Sometimes we can become so wrapped up in our own thoughts and feelings that something so life-giving as Easter happens and we are largely unaware.

Somewhere tucked in a photo album at home is a perfect picture of Easter. Imagine with me. Mark was 20 at the time. All of us who loved him understood that Mark would not likely live a long life. He lived in the shadow, or maybe the light, of Cystic Fibrosis – and at that time early adulthood was pushing the far edges of his disease.

More than anything else he wanted to go it alone in the family sailboat, a Sunfish, and ride the winds of Lake Winnepesaukee just by himself. It was on his bucket list long before the phrase became popular.

In the weeks leading up to this particular afternoon both he and his parents were aware that he was becoming increasingly frail. They could have stopped him, reasonably explaining that he was getting too weak. If he fell in the water, he might not have the strength to swim. It was a risky thing to do.

But Mark's heart's desire won out. He climbed into the tiny boat donned with a windbreaker and wrapped with a life jacket. His bare-feet wedged against the edge of the inner deck. His backside leaned just a little bit over the water. The wind filled his green and white striped sail. And off he went.

The photo simply shows Mark sailing away, but there was so much more in the scene. It was a day and a moment, an afternoon and an adventure, in the shadow of death, lived wholly, fully, in the light of life. St. Iraneaus said it just right: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." And that was Mark that day.

Mark died six weeks later. His father sent me the picture I have described along with some words that Mark carried in his wallet. "Easter is an affirmation of our deepest intuitions, our simple, child-like YES to life and our insistent NO to death. Easter tells us we can trust our burning hearts. Listen to the fire in your heart. What does it say you are? Does it say something

like this: 'I am alive. I am a miracle of life itself. I am a miracle of God. Deeper than all my guilt and fear, I am able to give and receive love. I am valuable. I am part of creation. I am not meant for death when I live, or when I die. I am meant to live, to create, to grow, to expand, to nurture, cherish life and not be afraid or indifferent, but passionate and compassionate.' Easter is an affirmation of that YES, that fire in your heart. Trust it. Live it. Nothing less."

Back to the road to Emmaus. "Did not our hearts burn within us?" That's the question in our scripture this early Easter dawn. And it has been the question of Easter day every since. Something completely mysterious had happened. No one could understand – not then or since. No one could explain – and not for lack of intellect. Jesus, who had died was alive! But the affirmation was and is and will always be that insistent YES to life.

And so it is, in the midst of shadows and light, for us and for the world, such moments descend; out of nowhere and out of everywhere. They keep coming. We can only receive them. And we do that by trusting that burning in our hearts.

On the Emmaus Road or at the corner of Farmington Avenue and South Main Street. Even today. Even here. Even now. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Amen.

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