

The 3rd Sunday of Easter: Holy Trinity Church: April 30, 2017

Luke 24:13-35:

Conviction, Faith, Transformation and Witness to Change the World

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Very often we miss the value of those around us who have sacrificed much for us. When I look back at my teachers, while I didn't appreciate them at the time, I now remember them with fondness and great gratitude because all of them transformed my life with education. These were the dear nuns, priests, and monks who spent the best parts of their lives educating little knuckle heads like me and my classmates. For that, I will always be grateful to them and thankful to God. I am very thankful to Sr. Helena St. James, my third grade teacher who told my young mother that I was a good boy, a quiet boy, but I was a boy with a wandering mind and that I liked to look out the window at the trucks going by. Sister Helena St. James suggested to my

mother that I would become a garbage truck driver someday. Now, don't get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with being a garbage truck driver. Let's just say, that was not my father and mother's vision for me. So, that message was brought home to my father and when he confronted me with sister's message, I made the big, big mistake of asking Dad, "What do you want me to be a brain?" Dad said, "Don't be a wise guy and yes, I do want you to be brain. Dad went on to say, "Sister Helena St. James is absolutely right!" Just keep on looking out that window and you will miss your education, and you will be driving that smelly garbage truck for the rest of your life. My point in telling you this story is that Sr. Helena St. James and my parents convicted me. They changed my way of thinking and they changed my lazy attitude. So, I buckled down and surprising to me, I started to do very well in school. That was over 50 years ago, every now and then, my dearest 90 year old father enjoys telling that story, especially the brain and the garbage truck part at family 'get togethers.'

My sisters and brothers in Christ, I think it would surprise us to know how often we miss the presence of Jesus the Christ in our midst just as Cleopas and his companion missed the significance of the stranger walking and talking with them on the road to Emmaus. Likewise, it is easy for us to miss the significance of the resurrection. So on the road to Emmaus, on your way home

today, don't miss the significance of the resurrection because it truly transforms us. Look closely at what happens to these men as they journey from Jerusalem to their home in the city of Emmaus seven miles away. A stranger, whom the reader knows is Jesus, joins them. He asks them what they are talking about and they stop dead in their tracks. They can hardly bring themselves to discuss it because they are so saddened and disappointed and depressed by the events of the last three days. Their friend, their Lord, their rabbi, the one they describe as a mighty prophet, has been unjustly condemned to death and violently killed on a cross. They say to their companion, *“Are you the only person in all of Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place?”*

This would be enough to unsettle anyone but new and disturbing information is being told. They have heard reports about His tomb being empty and the crazy notions of the women who say he is alive. Listen to what happens next on that dusty road at the end of the day. This is the part that intrigues me. Jesus begins to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures and explains to them how all these things were spoken of by Moses and the Prophets. He breaks open the Scriptures to them. He transforms their thinking. They had no idea these things were supposed to take place. They had concluded that Jesus' mission failed. They now understand that the last three days was the plan all along.

Finally the two men invite Jesus into their home. He has dinner with them. Again Jesus transforms the event. There at that ordinary dinner table at the end of the day this stranger takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, gives it to them and only then are their eyes opened in the breaking of the bread. In that moment their hearts are convicted. They see the light.

My brothers and sisters, do you see the light here? Something significant happened on that road to Emmaus. Something significant happened in the blessing and breaking of the bread. Something so significant happened to these disciples, that it transformed their lives forever. Do you see how the resurrection of Jesus redeemed them from the pit of despair, redeemed them from sadness, redeemed them from disappointment; Jesus' resurrection from the dead redeemed them and that something, so significant, resurrects us. The resurrection changes everything. It changes us. It moves us from despair to new possibilities of life. It takes us in our blindness and opens our eyes to the light. It changes our attitudes. It transforms ordinary bread and wine into a holy meal. The Resurrected Jesus takes two very sad men on the road to Emmaus who had lost the only world they knew and gives it back to them. Jesus comes to them and says see I am not dead. I am alive. Now go and tell the world. When the men realize that it is the risen Lord who is with them he vanishes. They turn to each other and say, "*Were not our hearts burning within*

us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Isn't that true to life? At that moment of conviction, we usually don't understand what is happening to us at that very moment. Our convictions do not always lead to conversion but change cannot happen unless we are first convicted because that leads us to faith. We may not recognize the conviction at first but on the road to Emmaus don't miss the significance of the resurrection that walks with you always, because it makes all of us witnesses.

And this is perhaps the area where most of us fail. Here is the challenge for us as disciples of Jesus Christ. Have you ever shared your faith? You are certainly not alone if you have never spoken to another person about the death and resurrection of Jesus because we swim in a culture which discourages conversations concerning religion in polite company.

I am a great admirer of the Rev. Billy Graham. I recently read that he has “preached the Gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history, over 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories” You can count the numbers, but you cannot measure the effect upon the world when one person reaches millions of people. Just try to calculate the homes kept intact, the marriages saved, the children given spiritually mature mothers and fathers, the young people saved from a myriad of addictions, and

thousands of other influences that Billy Graham has made upon millions of hearts and minds and spirits. You cannot. The significance of that one life cannot be calculated. No one can calculate the impact the resurrection has had upon the history of the human person.

My dear sisters and brothers, if you take the resurrection out of the Gospel and Christianity, it falls apart like a house of cards. Paul recognized this when he wrote to the Corinthians, some of whom were saying that the resurrection never happened. Paul made it clear. He said, if Christ has not been raised then your faith is in vain and the Gospel is nothing but a charade. Holy Trinity Church let me proclaim to you this day that Christ has indeed risen from the dead!

At the end of this story the two men do what is only natural. They get up, walk back to Jerusalem and tell the disciples that they have seen Jesus. That's being a witness. So, tell your friends what you have seen. Put on the glasses of faith. Take off the glasses of skepticism and doubt and life will take on a whole new meaning and new wonder. Remember this, even those who were closest to Jesus did not recognize him until they saw him in the breaking of the bread. When they were convicted only then were they able to shake off their disappointment and despair. But when they put on the glasses of faith and

realized he was in their midst, their hearts burned within them in joy and peace that the Lord Jesus Christ was alive.

My dear sisters and brothers, please tell your family, your loved ones and your friends; tell them your faith story. The best conversations I ever had were the times my father took the time to ‘shoot the breeze’ with me about Jesus. We still shoot the breeze about Jesus and of course the Red Sox. So, don’t hold back. Shoot the breeze about Jesus with your family, your children, your grandchildren, your loved ones and your friends. You do not have to be Billy Graham. You simply tell them what is in your heart. Share your faith. Share your life long challenges and changes. Be a witness to Jesus in your life. Tell your spiritual story. Sit down and write your spiritual autobiography. That will open your eyes. Then, let go and let God and the power of the resurrection will do the rest of the work for you. The Resurrection was the power behind the witness of the disciples. The Resurrection was the power behind the men on the road home to Emmaus. The Resurrection was the power of Paul who brought the gospel to Rome. The Resurrection was the power of Billy Graham who brought the gospel to the world. The Resurrection is the power behind Pope Francis as he brings Jesus’ words of peace to the people of Egypt. The Resurrection is the power behind the disciples of Jesus Christ, you and me, in how we live out our lives and how we

**live out our witness to the world. The resurrection of Jesus will convict you.
The resurrection of Jesus will bring you to the very heart of our faith. The
Resurrection will transform your life. The Resurrection will make you a
witness and a witness to the resurrection has the power to change the world.
AMEN.**