

April 26, 2020 Easter 3  
Luke 24:13-35  
Is COVID-19 Giving You Heart Burn?

***Luke 24:32 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?”***

Let’s dig into this great and very timely story from our Gospel lesson. It’s Easter day—sometime between when the ladies had gone to the tomb and when Jesus appeared to His disciples in the locked room Easter night.

Two people who had been to Jerusalem for the Passover are making their way back home to Emmaus. They’re talking and while they are talking Jesus walks up and joins them (but they don’t know it’s Jesus) and asks them what they are talking about. Look at the way Luke describes their reaction:

***Vs. 17-18 They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”***

“They stood still, their faces downcast.” They are astounded that He would even ask. They are grieving. They are afraid. They can’t believe there could be someone who hasn’t heard. This is like someone today who didn’t know what you were talking about when you mentioned COVID-19. But Jesus plays it cool and asked them, “Oh, what things are those?”

So they go on to explain about this powerful prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, who many thought would be the Messiah, but who was sentenced to death and crucified by the Jewish leaders. And now there are wild tales flying around about His tomb being empty and He’s actually not dead and some of the women claim to have seen Him, but they haven’t.

And you know Jesus is having a hard time not laughing, but He comes across rather sternly and tells them:

***VS. 25-27 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.***

Jesus met them right there in their fear and confusion and taught them all the way to Emmaus. But He needed to do more. So when they get to Emmaus, the two travelers invited him to stay. Jesus entered their house made Himself at home. Literally. He took the role of the host. Luke describes it this way:

***Vs. 30-32 he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> 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?”***

Then after Jesus disappeared, they made the seven mile trip back to Jerusalem, even though it was night, and shared the news with the disciples.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” Is COVID-19 giving you heart burn? Or should I say, what kind of heart burn is COVID-19 giving you.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is doing something and the couple on the Emmaus road don’t know what it is, but their hearts were burning.

Jesus is doing something right now in the middle of this mess we call COVID-19 or Coronavirus. And we can’t see it. But our hearts should be burning. Just as with the two on the road to Emmaus, this is a time for us to be learning and growing. Every crisis is a time for the church to learn and grow.

Several years ago, a couple of sociologists put together a chart on how we move from fear to learning to growth. This chart has been redone recently in light of COVID-19 and asks the question, “Who do I want to be during COVID-19?”

[show chart] I will make this available on our website: [www.stmatthew-ch.org](http://www.stmatthew-ch.org).

It has 3 zones: the fear zone, the learning zone and the growth zone.

The 2 Emmaus road disciples started out in the fear zone. They didn’t understand what was happening. They were confused and downcast. They couldn’t believe that this stranger who approached them on the road wasn’t in the same place they were.

In our society today, people in the fear zone:

- Hoard food, toilet paper and medicines they don’t need.
- Complain all the time.
- Transmit their anger and fear-related emotions to others in unhealthy ways.
- Try to bring others into their fear through spreading inaccurate information

If you are in this spot, there’s hope. Keep watching/reading. If you know people like this, don’t judge them. Look at how Jesus deals with people in the Fear Zone.

He enters into their midst and lets them express their fear:

***Vs. 16-19 He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the***

*only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?*<sup>19</sup> ***“What things?”*** he asked.

And then He began teaching. He moved them from the Fear Zone into the Learning Zone.

***Vs. 26-27 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”***<sup>27</sup> ***And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.***

This is where we need to be letting God position us now, Church. We need to have our learning caps on. We need to be turning our hearts and our minds to the Messiah who is walking along side of us right now. This One who had to suffer and die for us and enter His glory for us has stepped right into the middle of the Coronavirus to redeem it. Remember what we said a few weeks ago. We don't look for Jesus at the start of the coronavirus. He didn't start it. We look for Him in the middle of it, redeeming it, bringing about blessing—using it to transform us and using us to transform the world.

And Jesus teaches in all sorts of ways. Look at the story. After Jesus teaches the two Emmaus road disciples verbally, he teaches them experientially, perhaps even sacramentally:

***Vs. 30-32 he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.***<sup>31</sup> ***Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.***<sup>32</sup> ***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?”***

And they got it. Their eyes were opened and they moved from the Fear Zone to the Learning Zone.

So what does the learning zone look like right now in 2020 in the midst of COVID-19 and Shelter in Place orders? It looks like this:

- I stop compulsively consuming things that harm me, from food to news.
- I start letting go of things that are out of my control.
- I identify my emotions.
- I make myself aware of the situation and think about the best way to act.
- I verify information before I share it.
- I acknowledge everyone is trying their best.

If this is where you are right now, praise God! But don't stop there. Our goal isn't to learn. Our goal is mission. Our goal is being and making disciples. That comes about when God moves us from the Learning Zone to the Growth Zone. Look at how that happens for the Emmaus road disciples:

After Jesus revealed Himself to them, we read:

***VS. 32-35 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?"<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."<sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.***

They found their purpose and went to be that voice of hope.

So what does the Growth Zone look like in 2020 in the midst of COVID-19 and Shelter in Place orders? It looks like this

- I find God's purpose for me in the middle of the crisis.
- I think of how I can help others.
- Use my skills to service the ones in need.
- I show empathy to myself and others.
- I live in the present and focus on the future.
- I keep myself emotionally happy and transmit hope.
- I show gratefulness.
- I find ways to adapt to changes
- I practice calmness, patience, relationships and creativity.

So let's wrap up. This is where we want to be, Church. We want to recognize that the crucified and risen Jesus is walking along side of us in the middle of the mess. He's caring for us and listening to our fears. He's teaching us. He's growing us and giving us purpose, so that we can be His disciples and make disciples by being known by **love** and living by **faith** and being a voice of **hope**.