

FROM HEARTBREAK TO HEARTBURN**Luke 24:13-35**

INTRO: It was Sheila's graduation night from Elizabethtown High School and it was a MISERABLE June, 2002 evening in Elizabethtown, PA. As is typical in Southeastern PA in the summertime, you could cut the humidity with a dull knife. To make matters worse, it was to be held in the gym at Elizabethtown College. Yes, that is several thousand people cooped up in dripping heat. But, to make matters **REALLY** awful, a torrential downpour began as I dropped Kathy, Emily, and my mother off at the long walkway to the gym. I still can see in my mind's eye, Emily and my mom, who could not walk very well, and certainly not fast, making their way up the 50 yards to the entrance in the deluge. All the while Emily was thinking to herself, "I can't believe I'm doing this for my sister!"

One year later Sheila graduated from a Bible College near Quito, Ecuador and Kathy, Emily, and I flew there for the graduation AND a ten-day adventure in the Andes, where Sheila lived, and also down into the Amazon jungle. Believe it or not, social butterfly, would rather have stayed with her friends back in Bainbridge, PA, so she was thinking to herself, "I can't believe I'm doing this for my sister!"

Fast forward to May 2008. Its graduation day for Sheila at Ashland University. Unlike graduation day in 2002 the temperature was pleasant and the sunshine brilliant. We were sitting under the trees in the lawn in between Founders Hall and College Ave. Other than a bird in the branches above me that thought I was his personal toilet, it was a perfect situation – especially for Kathy, Emily and the people sitting around me who thought it was quite hilarious that the bird seemed to have zeroed in on me and me alone.

But Sheila was graduating from the College of Education, which is a very large college – I think the largest. It was also the last to receive diplomas. And since, at the time, Sheila was still 8 years from being Sheila Beach, she was still Sheila Tyson, which means, being at the end of the alphabet, she was one of the last to receive her diploma. The commencement ceremony was over three hours long and Emily was thinking to herself, "I can't believe I'm doing this for my sister!"

Fast forward to 2010. It's the Thursday night before Memorial Day, and Emily's graduation from Ashland High School was just two days away. To her delight, her three aunts (my sisters) had come for the festivities – but where was Sheila? Sheila was in Panama where she was a school teacher – Sheila would not be at Emily's graduation! Nosiree!!!! Even though Emily had suffered with sweat drops of blood through three of Sheila's graduations, Sheila wouldn't deign to be at her big night. OR SO SHE THOUGHT! (Finish the story)

Isn't it funny that we're surprised when the desires of our heart come true? Isn't it funny how we think God will ignore our heartache and allow us to stay in our grief? One of my favorite expressions is something Bishop John Zuck often repeated, "*Isn't it just like God to give us the desires of our heart?*" You see God is a God of surprises and he is a God of joy. And he often blesses his kids by surprising them with joy. That's what he did for the two disciples we read about in our scripture for today. Listen, **(Read Luke 24:13-35 – not on the screen – too long)** This was a case of heartache very quickly turning into heartburn. Not the awful discomfort of the physical ailment, instead they had hearts burning with almost delirious joy. They thought it was all over, when, in truth, God's plan was really just getting underway. As we continue this Lenten series entitled, Open the eyes of my heart Lord, we will see how we see God and often don't recognize him. First...

The grave was empty and they still didn't see Jesus

- We have no idea who these two disciples were. Many people think they were actually a husband and wife. They were obviously close to Jesus, that's why they were called disciples. But for some reason they did not recognize Jesus. This is interesting, since it takes a while to walk 7 miles – you'd think in that time they would have realized who he was. I'm sure their eyes were full of tears. Their hearts were breaking – maybe that clouded their vision. But I don't think so.
- They had heard the news, and they believed it – THE GRAVE WAS EMPTY! JESUS WASN'T IN IT! Well, where was he? Where had they taken his body. "Could it be. . . ? Noooo! That's just too good to be true." An empty grave meant one thing: A dead man was obviously not there. That's all. So, they walked along still grieving and being amazed at what they were hearing from this stranger.
- The truth is, I think God kept them from recognizing him. He wanted to give them a teachable moment, as it were. And it worked.

- Jesus amazed them first in that he had not heard the news. And it seemed he did not know about Jesus. So they described him. It was an adoring description. “*He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.*” Luke 24:19. But that’s all he is to people who don’t believe he is risen. He was just a good man.
- And he had been betrayed by the very people who should have embraced him – *the chief priests and their rulers* Luke 24:20. On top of all that, by all his wise teaching and miracles it seemed God had to validate Jesus, but had not intervened and had allowed Jesus to be crucified. That was especially heartbreaking. They had had big hopes – now they were dashed. What the women had reported was that they had arrived at the tomb and there was no body.
- So he began to talk – this man who had come upon them on the road. He talked about what Moses and the prophets had said in the holy scriptures. He knew a lot. Little did they know he knew EVERYTHING. He wasn’t just any stranger, he was God. As they walked, they listened.
- You see . . .

They believed the prophets . . . kinda

- They were like good, religious people everywhere and in every era – they believe just enough for it to make sense to their finite minds. Once it gets beyond the limits of their belief or imagination, then, they just kinda believe.
- The scriptures this incognito Jesus explained were what we know as the Old Testament – the front part of our hardcopy Bibles. Exactly which scriptures he explained isn’t implied any more than he explained the “*what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*” Luke 24:27. Do you know what that means? That the scriptures are full of the message of God’s plan for the deliverance of humanity from the grip of sin. It doesn’t matter which scriptures, and it doesn’t matter where in the Old Testament or New Testament you find them, the message of Jesus is here.
- The problem is, God’s people are often the same as these two – people – they know what scripture says – “But it *really* doesn’t actually mean that, does it?” And the answer is: What scripture says, it means. Scripture is God’s message to his people. That means we need to believe it. Too often we don’t. Or we pick and choose what we will believe. We do what I call salad bar Christianity. We take a little of this and a little of that, and we leave that which we don’t like in the bowl. We accept what is convenient and disregard what is not. Sometimes we’re just like these two grief-stricken disciples and we completely miss the truth right when it’s in front of us, simply because it’s too good to be true. We believe, kinda.
- And also . . .

The scandal of the Cross tripped them up

- They had hoped this Jesus of Nazareth “*was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*” Luke 24:21. They had high hopes – not only as far as their faith was concerned, but also for their political aspirations. Gary Milley writes, “*The people of Jesus day wanted a conquering Saviour, a champion who would destroy their enemies. When great miracles brought the crowds, they wanted to make him king. But when he talked about dying they wanted no part of him. When he was crucified like a common criminal, they fled. They didn’t want a Saviour like that. He didn’t die like a hero.*” The Cross was not the place a conquering king ended up. They must have missed the signals. They were sadly mistaken.
- That’s the problem with hanging your political hopes on Jesus. His plan is not earthly in scope – it’s eternal. He’s not democrat or republican, he’s not American or English. He’s not red or yellow black or white, OR Jewish. It’s not that he doesn’t care about earthly governance, it’s just so much less than what he has in store for humanity. That’s why the Cross was, and still is, so scandalous – it trips people up – that’s what scandal has at its root meaning – a stumbling block. And that’s exactly how Paul described it in 1 Corinthians 1:23 – but that’s another sermon.
- The truth was, as the stranger explained it to the two disciples, the suffering was a necessary prelude to Jesus being raised to Glory, and if they really knew him they would have known he had to endure it. (v. 26)
- Well, suffice it to say, we still struggle with having God’s plan in our own neat, little packages when the truth is right in front of us. Truth be told, failure to see God’s plan is often from a simple failure to embrace God’s plan.

- But there is a happy ending: these two travelers had their heart-broken and upside-down world joyfully restored when they kindly invited the shadow Jesus into the safety and hospitality of their home. They found what everyone does when they truly have their eyes opened. It's this:

We recognize Jesus when we truly commune with him

- It's interesting that this guest, whom they still did not recognize, seemed to take over the meal and became the host. He took the bread and he broke it. And as he did, they knew exactly who he was – THIS WAS JESUS! RISEN FROM THE DEAD! And then he was gone. His job was done with them. His teachable moment was complete.
- They looked at each other and said those incredibly picturesque words, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*" Luke 24:32. "We should have known!!! He was right here. His words stirred us in the same way his words have captivated us for 3 years!" From heart broken to hearts bursting just like that! What a case of heartburn!!! "He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today. He walked with me and he talked with me along that narrow way. He lives! He lives!"
- And then they immediately ran the 7 miles back to Jerusalem that they had just traversed a few hours earlier and told the disciples there. That's what a burning heart can do. You can't keep it to yourself. That's the way it is when we finally see Jesus for who he is. When we truly spend time with him, we clearly see the truth.

Conclusion: Emily didn't believe her sister would come home from Panama when the end of the Panamanian school year was just two weeks away and Sheila would come home for her summer break of almost two months as she always did. But she did. And Emily was surprised by joy.

Two disciples who should have known better thought that the end of a wonderful thing had arrived. Their wonderful Rabbi was dead. His grave was empty but he was dead, for certain. But they weren't certain. They knew what Moses and the prophets had said. They just needed to believe it – even if they were scandalized by the fact that Jesus had died a criminal's death on a cruel instrument of torture. But when they saw him, they **REALLY** saw him – and their heartbreak burst into hearts burning with joy and gratitude.

Keep your eyes open for Jesus. He's where you expect him to be, even if you didn't expect him. Amen.