

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, April 6, 2008  
Rev. John Tapscott

“A HEART-WARMING EXPERIENCE”

Luke 24:34,35

Two weeks ago we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. But Easter Sunday is not just one day - it is a season. Now it is not as long as the winter season we've just endured and which is hopefully over now, but the Easter season is seven weeks from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. And throughout this Easter season the Christian church emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Someone said that the most important words in the Apostles Creed are these, “the third day he rose from the dead.” Without those, the rest of the Creed would be meaningless, in fact, there would be no creed, no faith, no church. So in this Easter season, the church continues to proclaim the good news that “the Lord is risen indeed!”

But sometimes we say these words from our heads, rather than from our hearts. Now we should believe in the resurrection on the witness and trustworthiness of Scripture alone. “The Lord is risen,” says the Bible and that should be enough. Furthermore, the corroborating evidence for the resurrection is very strong. But sometimes the intellectual argument cannot quite satisfy us. We need some kind of heart-warming experience of Christ's presence to convince us of his resurrection. And Christ gives such an experience to all who sincerely seek him. Now our experience will not be like that of the eyewitnesses like Mary and Peter and James and John. Our experience of the risen Christ may be more like that of the two disciples we read about today in Luke 24:13-35. This beautiful story took place on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus and contains a wonderful truth for us. It tells us that we can meet Jesus and know in our hearts as well as in our heads that he is alive. We can meet Jesus and know that he is risen indeed. This passage tells us where we can expect to meet the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

*First, we can expect to meet Jesus as a companion along the way.*

Luke tells us, “Two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But

their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

The Risen One draws near and goes with his people as an unseen companion along the way. His promise is not idle, “I am with you always to the close of the age.” A frightened young soldier asked his chaplain tearfully. “Please pray for me. We jump off in an hour. Please pray that I will come back alive.” The chaplain replied, “Son, I can’t offer that prayer. You are going out there where grenades and bombs are exploding. Some are not going to come back. I can’t ask God to favour you more than he does the other soldiers. But here’s what I’ll do. I’ll go with you.” That’s what Jesus does. Through all life brings us for good or bad, he goes with us. “Lo, I am with you always,” is his unbreakable promise.

Of course, we don’t always know his presence. For some reason known only to him, he may deliberately hide himself from us. Or sometimes our eyes are kept from recognizing him because we are too preoccupied, too anxious, or too sad. But somewhere along the way Jesus’ presence breaks through and we know that he is with us. Now we can’t predict when or where that will happen, but that’s what makes following Christ such an adventure. Somewhere along the way your heart will be warmed by his very real presence. You will know beyond doubt that he is alive. I had that experience in a time of serious illness, during the ride to the hospital, and in the emergency room as I was being attended to by the medical personnel. Christ was there. I knew it. And that’s why I laugh when someone says that Christ didn’t rise from the dead. For I experienced his real presence and I knew that whatever happened to me I would not be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now sometimes it is only afterward that our eyes are opened and we know that Christ has been our companion on the way. But that too is a heart-warming, faith-strengthening experience. That’s what happened to the Emmaus road disciples. Afterwards they asked one another, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

The favourite poem “Footprints” speaks of that experience. “One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Scenes from his life flashed across the sky and he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life had flashed before him, he saw that at the lowest and saddest times there was only one set of footprints. Dismayed he asked, “Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you’d walk with me all the way. I don’t understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me.” The Lord replied, “My precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, that was when I carried you.”

Are you following Jesus and seeking to walk in his way? Then you can expect that

somewhere along the road you will meet him as a real helper and companion. Your heart will be warmed and you will be able to say with conviction. “The Lord is risen indeed!”

*Secondly, we can expect to meet the Risen One as we hear Scripture read and interpreted.*

As the two perplexed disciples walked the Emmaus road and told the stranger about all that had happened that day, he said to them “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” And beginning with Moses and the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” What a great Bible study that must have been, to have the Risen Christ interpreting Scripture. Today God gives the church preachers like me to interpret and apply Scripture. But God gave those disciples Christ himself to do it! Later they said “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” Their slow hearts had become burning hearts as Christ revealed himself to them through the Scripture.

Now something like that can happen to us. Not always, of course. There are times when Scripture seems to be a dead word which falls to the ground before it reaches us. But other times the Scripture pierces our hearts and minds. You know that it is God’s truth, meant for you. And that heart-warming experience is nothing other than the presence of the Risen Christ himself. After all, he is the centre of Scripture. All Scripture leads to him. We preachers can start with any portion of Scripture and with proper interpretation bring listeners to Christ.

Christians who discipline themselves to read Scripture daily inevitably find Christ more real in their lives. Here’s a little hint for reading Scripture. I used to try to read a chapter of the Bible every day. But I actually find myself reading less these days, sometimes just a paragraph or two at a time and really trying to hear what God is saying to me through those verses. I’m finding that more satisfying than treating Scripture as a marathon you must race through by a certain deadline. Somewhere on our journey with Christ we can expect Him to warm our hearts as Scripture is read and interpreted.

*Finally, we can expect to meet Christ in the breaking of bread.*

As the travellers approached Emmaus, it seemed the stranger was going further, but they asked him to stay with them. He sat at table with them, took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and then he vanished out of their sight. Perhaps they recognized the characteristic way he broke bread, or perhaps they glimpsed the wounds in his hands. In any case, they now knew that Jesus was risen and alive. And with burning hearts and swift feet, they returned to Jerusalem and told

the eleven what had happened on the road and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

The breaking of bread speaks to us of this sacrament of holy communion. And perhaps it is here where we become most convinced that Jesus is risen and alive. You know it, don't you. There is something extra here, a presence, when we break bread and share the cup together. Of course, Jesus is with us at other times, but somehow his presence is more real as we hear the words, "This is my body broken for you, This is my blood shed for you."

Followers of Jesus, don't neglect the sacrament of Holy Communion! This is the high point of Christian worship. For here we come to Christ and he comes to us in a powerful, even life-changing way. So receive this sacrament today with faith, and expect the Risen One to meet you here and to make himself known to you. Perhaps it will be through a peace within or a warmth in your heart, or a sense of someone beside you, or the knowledge that you are a forgiven and redeemed child of God, held by a love that will never let you go, in this world or the next. And if and when that happens by God's grace, you will go from here to tell others, "The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed."