

WGUMC April 21, 2013 Luke 24:13-35 "Heart to Heart"

There's a sermon I'd like to preach today. It's about the two disciples going for a walk on a fine Easter Day, getting out of the city, getting out into nature, encountering the risen Christ in open spaces. For me, it's Easter three mornings a week out in Almaden Quicksilver Park.

But if I were to preach that sermon, you'd say to me, "Are you the only person in this country who does not know the things that have taken place here in these days?" [see Luke 24:18] And if I said, "What things?" You'd tell me, "The things about the bombing in Boston, the explosion in Texas, the poisoned letter to the president, the failed vote in the Senate, and the suicide in Saratoga!"

My friends, I'm sorry, but this isn't going to be an Earth Day sermon. There are unearthly things we need to deal with, and I think we need a heart-to-heart. Many of us woke up on Tuesday morning with an all-too-familiar feeling. The heart sinks.

The stomach tightens. The mind starts to lose focus. We're back in that old familiar place: Fear. The front page of the paper said it all: "Who? Why?"

And then we started hearing about the heroes: the ordinary folk who jumped the barricades to help the victims; the people who ran toward the explosion, rather than away from it; the first responders and emergency room doctors who had to deal with a crushing load of casualties that even front-line medics rarely face.

Who? Why? For days, we didn't know where the suspects were, but we who believe in Easter know where the Savior was on that day. If he was on Emmaus Road, then he was also on Boylston Street. And he wasn't just walking. He was running and tending to people in need. We hope that someday the survivors will look back on that day and remember how their hearts were burning, even as their legs were burning, because the love they saw was so real. The care they received was so

tender. No bomb could ever blow that memory away. We know that people recognized the risen Christ on that day, if not in the breaking of bread, then in the breaking of flesh and bone.

I remember years ago watching the runners come in when I was a college kid in Boston. I'm glad I wasn't there this year. But don't you wonder what you would have done if you had been there? I'd like to imagine that if we'd been the ones to comfort the victims, we wouldn't have had to search for words to say or sentiments to share. For it would've been the most natural thing in the world to tell each one of them that God loves them and to offer to pray for them. I'm pretty sure that we wouldn't have hesitated. We wouldn't have had to think twice about it; we would've just done it.

That got me to thinking: why does something that would be so easy to do on Boylston Street seem so hard to do on Lincoln Avenue? Thank God our neighborhood hasn't been the target of a terrorist attack. But that doesn't mean that there

aren't bombs going off in people's lives all around us all the time. So, we have to ask ourselves: Aren't their spiritual wounds every bit as life threatening as physical wounds? Are we jumping the barricades to be there for them? And when they remember us, will they be thinking, "were not our hearts burning within us while they were talking to us on the road, while they were sharing God's love with us?"

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were devastated by the act of terror they witnessed on Good Friday and too shell-shocked to know what to think of the rumors they heard on Easter Sunday. So they were talking to each other, heart to heart, and sharing the love that Jesus had left them.

Friends, that's what all of us disciples have to do. That's all we can do. When we meet someone who's in the throes of grief, who's going through divorce, who's coming to terms with the diagnosis, who's about to lose their job, our first job is not

to run away. Our first job is to stay and quickly assess the situation. Are they breathing? Are they bleeding? What are they needing?

Even more important than EMT training is a license in listening. So don't tell them your troubles. They don't need to hear your horror stories. Listen to their story. Then you'll know what to say and how to pray. If this someone is a friend, it's easy. "Joe, I hear you're lonely. I'm here to be a friend. But I'm not your only friend. I think God is the reason I ran into you today."

God is always the reason we run into someone in need. But it isn't until we are talking heart-to-heart with them that we realize that. Not until we start listening to someone else's story do we sense the presence of our Savior. "Were not our hearts burning within us...?"

Now if that person isn't a close friend, but a total stranger, it's a bit harder. We tend to close our hearts to

strangers. And they guard theirs. But sometimes, despite their best efforts, life catches them unaware, and they let their guard down. That's our God-given opportunity to show them we care.

You've all seen a checker who's been having a bad day. Without thinking, you may ask them, "How are you?" When they answer, "You don't want to know," how hard is it to say, "Yes, I do"? Or if they say, "Not so good," what would it take to say, "Don't worry. God is good"? The fact is that showing just a little bit of compassion can start a holy conversation. And when you run out of encouraging words to say, you can close with an invitation.

After walking and talking with him, the disciples invited this Jesus whom they didn't recognize to stay with them. The day was getting late. They were getting hungry. We, too, can invite a friend, a stranger, into our hearts and into our spiritual home. After they've been real with us, it's not so unreal to say

to them, "You know, my faith is what helps me." Or "My church is the family that hasn't given up on me."

You never know. If they feel listened to, if they feel cared for, they may just be in the right place to ask, "And what church do you go to?" That's why we're going to print some invitation cards for you to keep in your purse or wallet, so you don't have to preach a sermon. Just give one of your cards to friends you run into in the course of your week or to strangers who are just having a bad day. These cards are for whoever it is who opens up their hearts to you because you've taken the time to open your heart to them.

Of course, that friend or stranger may not be in the right place at all. They may not be on the road to Emmaus that day. And that's OK. Maybe you can extend that invitation, maybe Jesus will show up in your conversation on another day. Meanwhile, you can continue to pray.

Last week, I asked you to pray for a person who needs God in their life, a person you know or one you don't know, and to pray that God might put you somewhere along their way, on the road to Emmaus with them, so that you can be the Scripture they open, you can be the Bible they read, and you can be the occasion for the Savior they open their eyes to see.

You see, we didn't have to be in Boston this past week. There are plenty of opportunities to be the first to respond to a dire need right here on our street. Believe me, being a disciple of Jesus Christ is risky wherever you are. For Christians, Silicon Valley is a pretty tough beat. And though we don't get a spiffy uniform and we probably won't get our picture in the paper, the rewards are very sweet.

So happy Earth Day to everyone who gets out there with an open heart and a burning desire to bring a little more heaven down to earth, a little more God to light in this Valley of the Heart's Delight.