

Rev. Missy Shiverick  
Sermon April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Luke 24, 13-35  
“Our Hearts Burning Within Us”

On NPR a few weeks ago there was a segment on magic. It seems that scientists are now taking a real interest in studying the art of magic and how it uses patterns in the human brain. Scientists have discovered what magicians have known for centuries; that is the person who is being tricked actually aids in making the magic. Magicians use that fact that the human's brain can be tricked into seeing things that are not there and can be fooled into only seeing what they imagine. A scientific study was used as an example. In the study, people were told to watch a video of children bouncing balls. They were told to watch the balls bounce very carefully. And, in fact the people watched the balls drop with such intensity that they did not notice a clown walk behind the children in the video. They played this video for hundreds of people and the vast majority did not see something which is SOOOOO obvious once it is pointed out. Once it is pointed out, everyone thinks, 'How could people NOT see the clown'!?!? Scientists use this study to point out that we only see things we are conditioned or programmed to see. The people in the study anticipated the children to continue bouncing the balls with the same background they had become accustomed to seeing so that is what they saw. In the same way magicians use our mind's ability to pre-program an experience when performing magic. Another word for this is paradigms. We see things within our paradigms and can not take in those things that are without it. To see new things we need to learn to shift our paradigms. This is important as only in shifting paradigms can we imagine the unimaginable and let dreams become reality.

And humanity was certainly not programmed to experience the Easter event! It was not in anyone's thoughts or experiences. This morning's Gospel passage illustrates this clearly. This dear little story is found only in Luke and it tells of two of Jesus' followers who were traveling on the road to Emmaus on what was Easter morning. They were clearly in mourning and just like anyone who have ever mourned intensely knows; they were in that dulled and confused stage that people go through. In fact so intense was their preoccupation with their own condition that they failed to recognize the risen Jesus even while spending a day with him.

Listen now for the word of God as it is written in the Gospel of Luke 24:13-53.

(Gospel Reading)

These two men were traveling down a dirt road. Although they traveled in daylight, they were figuratively in the dark. They were in shock over what had happened in the past 48 hours. They had been followers of the man Jesus who was to be their Messiah. He was to be their great political leader who would restore the Kingdom of Israel. Then the government crucified him and they were in the intense shock of mourning. These two men had not found on Calvary what they had hoped for. They had hoped Jesus would usher in a new political climate, but the tragedy of the cross had robbed these two disciples of all hope. Their belief and hope had come to a dead end. Even the women's story bewildered them. They did not understand what I meant and it surely wasn't what they had thought, planned for and envisioned. Jesus wasn't the conqueror they envisioned so they could not accept what was happening.

Then a man appeared on the road and walked with them. The author of Luke lets us, the readers; know it is Jesus the Risen Christ, but the two disciples were not able to tell. Their senses were dulled and they were not able to recognize the man for whom they were mourning and experiencing such intense grief and disappointment. Debbie Blue in her commentary on this text which appeared in this week's Christian Century, wrote that they presumably knew the scripture; they lived and traveled with Jesus so they knew the pitch of his voice and maybe even the sounds he made in his sleep; the way he chewed his food – and yet once he is crucified, dead and buried and raised, they actually look him in the face and can't see him. Maybe that is why these two weren't his greatest disciples. Maybe Cloppas and the other disciple always sat at the edge of the meals, near the door, where they could slip outside and smoke when discussions got long winded. Maybe if it had been Peter and another of the twelve, it would be different. But Jesus chose these two. They were so dense that even when Jesus expounded on Scripture using himself as the example of the Messianic prophecies, the disciples could not experience the man as the Risen Christ. The author gives us two reasons for this which are very relevant to us as well.

The first is that it wasn't what they were expecting. They have said their Messiah was going to be a great political leader, a new king,

a source of power; and the cross represented weakness and failure to them. The women's account of what had just happened on Easter morning was outside their expectation and experience, so they are not amazed by their account but terribly confused by it. It is so outside their thinking that they see no glory in it. The psychological term for this is that it is outside their paradigm. As I said before, paradigms are patterns we set up out of our experiences. Math is now taught in this way as children conceptualize numbers and values in terms of patterns. It is in our experience that there is a sunrise every morning so it is in our paradigm. We assume the sun will come up tomorrow because it is in our paradigm. In this way of thinking paradigms are good, unless they blind us from another way of thinking.

The famous description of this is the following. The Swiss watch makers had been known for centuries as the finest watchmakers. Their craftsmanship in watches was so superior that just owning a Swiss watch meant quality. They were lifetime acquisitions with guaranteed quality and accuracy. You might have one or two that have been handed down if the family from grandparents as I do as they were the best that money could buy. That was until 1969 when something happened: The Swiss, although still making fine watches, no longer represent the Rolls Royce of watches..... The Quartz watch was invented. It is more accurate, cheaper to make, and less fragile. And now for the story paradigm.... Guess who invented the quartz watch? A Swiss watchmaker! He took his invention to his higher ups and they saw no value in it. They could not see how what he had was better than this watch they had perfected. So when they took the watch to the trade show the next year, the Swiss had not even bothered to protect it with a patent. A man from Texas Instruments and another from Seiko went by that first quartz watch at the show and were able to see the value and potential in the invention. The Swiss watchmakers could not see outside their paradigms.

Well, back to the Bible passage... These two gentlemen were stuck in their paradigms as well. They could not get past their thoughts that the Messiah had to be a powerful warrior king that could take control so they could see no glory in Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It just wasn't in their paradigm.

The second reason they did not recognize Jesus seemed to anger him. The men were in mourning, clearly stuck in an angry and blaming stage because they somehow felt as though Jesus had personally let them down. How dare that man who called himself the Son of God end up suffering on the cross.

They felt as though Jesus had failed them. Jesus calls this way of thinking foolish. He quotes the prophets and showed that they prophesied that all this would happen. The risen Christ tells them, “Do you not know that it was necessary for Christ to suffer to enter his glory?” Christ was clearly disappointed that these men thought everything was just going to be handed to them on a silver platter. Jesus says, “Who says that the going wasn’t going to be hard?” If one expects life to be only joyful, easy, and happy, one is going to live a very unhappy life. It is the happy person who knows the struggles in life and can truly delight and be joyful when things are right.

So, after telling the man this, Jesus gets ready to depart from them. He was probably frustrated by their inability to perceive who he was and accepts his true message. But to the disciples credit, when Jesus states he is going to depart from them, they insist, however, and that he travel with them and stay with them that evening. What a beautiful little side to the story. Even in their intense mourning and anger, the men are able to reach out and aid a stranger. Jesus accepts the invitation and it is at dinner, as Jesus hands them the bread after he had broken it, something as common as “Pass the Peas Please!” at the dining room table, that their eyes were opened and they experienced him as the risen Christ. At that point, Jesus disappears and they immediately leave to join the other disciples and proclaim that Christ has risen, Christ has risen indeed! They were finally able to move past their mourning and experience their calling as the new church, proclaiming the good news in Jesus Christ.

Over the Lenten season one of the speakers in the “Five Great Evenings of Sharing” was a woman who taught us about Agnation Prayer. One of the disciplines she uses in her meditations and prayers is to think through the day and to think about an emotion or event that has not settled with you yet. Could it be a negative comment? Could it be a stressful experience? Could it be a bad conversation with a friend or relative? Then to ask for God to be there with you as you work through the experience. Asking God or Jesus to be in certain situations has helped me try to see God in people and events around me. It is another form of that hokey “What would Jesus do” but one which asks where God is in each situation. It is helping me be more accepting, more forgiving, and more charged in my ministry. Perhaps it might in yours as well. See there really is good news in all this. We might, individually and corporately be as foggy in our perceptions of Christ and God’s plans for us as these Disciples, but even they eventually caught on to what Christ was offering them. And Christ is here for us as well and will not

abandon us no matter how foggy our minds seem to his message and plan. And eventually we will catch on, just as those disciples did. We will recognize that God is always there. We will know that Christ will continually offer this good news and we will, perhaps in something as simple as being offered food or singing a hymn, or praying a prayer receive the good news too. And when we do we will say, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and when he opened us to the scriptures? We will say, "It is so obvious to us, why didn't we catch on before!" And then we will catch on and shout, "The Lord has risen, Christ has risen indeed!" Amen.