

Intro

How did you become a Christian? Have you had an experience of your 'heart burning inside you' and not being able to stop speaking about who Jesus is for you?

Not all have had an experience like this. Quite a few have become a Christian like I have. I was born and brought up in a Christian family, and found going to Church boring. But at that time there was no question about staying home. No, those were the house rules, if you lived in my mum and dad's house then you go to church – twice on a Sunday.

But then there were experiences that helped me see that God was real: my first answered prayer as a young boy. My mother who saw Jesus when she had a near death experience and did not want to come back to normal life. This resulted in a quiet conviction that Jesus is alive.

Moving forward to the Dunamis conferences that we attended: seeing the Holy Spirit in action, being able to forgive my mother and sense the deep love and warmth of the Holy Spirit in me. Those were experiences that made my heart burn inside me. Plus the teaching from the Bible and

the Bible stories often coming alive to me, as if I can see them played out in front of me.

The Road to Emmaus

You have probably heard the story of the road to Emmaus many times and have heard many sermons about it. But this time I want to focus on three aspects:

1. Recognising Jesus through the study of scripture and the breaking of the bread,
2. When the normal becomes sacred and
3. The burning hearts of two disciples.

Emmaus Road 1 – Word and breaking of bread

Reading the story this time what stood out for me is the two ways in which Jesus interacts with these two followers. They were in despair, still dealing with the grief of Jesus' death and unable to reconcile the reports of the disciples and the women: the empty grave and a vision of angels. And here they walk to Emmaus. Why? Did the return to their homes, to familiar territory? Had they given up on the promise of the redemption of Israel that Jesus gave them? We do not know. But Jesus comes alongside, and although they don't recognise him a pattern of conversation begins that seems very similar to the Rabbi – Disciple conversation. Questions, uncertainty and then answers. Jesus explains to them what

had happened not by telling them about the events, but by explaining Scripture to them by Moses and the Prophets. e.g. the Old Testament as we know it today. He would have recalled the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the need of sacrifice for sin from Moses. Scripture was opened and explained.

And then they invite him to dinner. Again he takes the role of the Rabbi, as they were used to: he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. This routine, this simple ceremony at the beginning of the meal opened their eyes and they recognised Jesus. And as he disappeared they looked at themselves and recognised that their hearts were burning inside them.

They did not recognise Jesus physically – and we do not know why. But they recognised him from the scriptures and from the experience of being with him. His manners, his actions and his authority. The combination of explanation of the Word and the breaking of the bread brought Jesus alive to them.

This is still the case in our services: Word and Sacrament; with the idea that in the combination of the two we will see Jesus and meet with him.

Emmaus Road 2 - Sacred vs Normal

But often when we do things in Church we want them to be sacred. We look to the preacher to help us to a supernatural understanding of God's word and we look at the celebration of Holy Communion to have a real meeting with Jesus. And at the end of the service we may be disappointed that this was not the case, this Sunday. Yes, we learned something and, yes, we felt encouraged and strengthened... but it was not a 'wow' occasion.

That is often the case when we want to meet Jesus on our terms. But how often do we let Jesus meet us on his terms? Like the two on the road to Emmaus did?. There was no worship service, no communion liturgy. Just two people walking away from the events in despair and Jesus meets them on the road and at the table. Unexpected. Unplanned.

What are our expectations? Do we separate the normal from the sacred in our minds? Where do we meet with Jesus? In the Church or in the Supermarket? At the communion table or when eating a meal with friends? Do we expect Jesus to turn up there too? Do we invite Jesus to these events?

The two on the road to Emmaus did not know that normal life had become sacred when they walked and ate with Jesus. They could only see it after the fact. How many times have we seen Jesus' actions in our lives but only looking backwards?

When I was at my last day before the summer holidays at university I had to choose a different work placement. My original choice had fallen through. The tutor gave me a list and asked me to pick one. I chose Kimberly-Clark not knowing anything of them. That normal life event turned out to be a sacred event, as it was at Kimberly-Clark that I got my first and only job, met and married Ada, got the opportunity to move to the UK and upon moving here joined the URC. I did not recognise that a normal moment became a sacred moment, although for me it was a moment of despair: all my plans had to change! I did not recognise God making the choice for me: Kimberly-Clark. Do we recognise the sacred in our normal life events? Even if it is after the fact?

Emmaus Road 3 - Burning hearts

It is when these things come together: scripture, an experience of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and normal life becoming sacred that we meet with Jesus. It is at this stage

that we notice our hearts burning inside us: because we have met Jesus.

The problem is that often our hearts burn for a short while and then the sacred feeling fades and normal life intrudes. It is hard to keep our hearts burning all the time. So we need to remember, and relive these times that our hearts burned inside of us. To remember the event I had a college or my mum's telling me of her experience meeting Jesus or the times at Dunamis.

At the moment you may not feel like this at all. We have Covid, social distancing and everything, on top of all the things that we are struggling with. Health issues, financial issues, relationship issues, just to name a few. Life is not easy and sometimes it knocks us for six.

And then we think – where is God in all of this? Why do I not have an experience of Jesus now, as I used to do? If you feel like that then ask Jesus to bring you back to those times in your life and remind you of his love and his power and his resurrection. Try to see where he is in our normal lives: at the supermarket, on the golf course, cleaning the house or doing the garden.

Ask God to refresh our burning desire for him in our hearts again. Remember our first love for Jesus. Remember our first encounters with him. And see where he leads us.

Summary and application

So let us continue to read and study scripture: the word of God. Let us continue to come together and celebrate communion together (even virtually). But also see beyond our normal weekly lives and see the sacredness of Jesus in our daily lives. Invite him into everything you do, and let him take charge.

Just like the two on the road to Emmaus: They did not recognise the stranger, but interacted with him, invited him in their home and shared a meal with him. It was only then that they recognised Jesus.

So be expectant. Jesus may be more often in your life than you realise! Give him thanks and glory at all times. He is with you – whatever you do and whatever you experience. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Amen.