

THE HEART OF THE MATTER - "FROM THE HEART"

Easter tide

I Peter 1:21-23
Luke 24:30-32

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Catherine Foote
University Congregational United Church of Christ
Seattle, Washington 98125
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Scripture:

I Peter 1:21-23¹

Through Christ you have come to trust in God who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are set on God.

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring Word of God.

Luke 24:30-32

When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. And they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?"

Pastor Catherine Foote

Prayer

God,
May the words of my mouth
The meditations of our heart
Find a place and a resonance with Your heart as well
For You are our strength and our Redeemer.
Amen

Many of you know Don Guthrie and Candace Tkachuck. You might not have known how to pronounce Candace's last name. I always stumble on it as well. But Don and Candace are leaders – lay leaders – in this congregation. Don serves right now on church council as our treasurer and Candace has been very active in the creativity council that helps shape worship in this congregation. So, what you might know is that Don and Candace right now are on a cross country bicycle ride. Now some of you might actually know about that ride because you're following them on the blog which they have titled "Our Southern Discomfort".² As somebody who has been across the country on a bicycle, I can identify with Don Guthrie's "southern discomfort". It is quite amazing to get on a bicycle and by human power cross 3500 miles of this country.

¹ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). 1989

² Found at: oursoutherndiscomfort.com.

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But Candace is in the car. She's driving support, right? What is *her* southern discomfort? Candace has made a commitment as she crosses the southern route of this country to engage in conversations with strangers about race, racism, and privilege. Every day. All the way across this country. Whew! What a commitment: to step in to a place of discomfort, to have conversations that aren't easy, and to stay with it. I highly recommend following them on this journey. They're in Austin, Texas today. They started on the coast of California and by the end of May they hope to be in Florida. Today they're in Austin.

But a few weeks back Candace wrote about a conversation she had in Phoenix, Arizona. Now again I'll take you back to the physical part of the bicycle ride and the fact that if you've ever ridden your bike for more than 6 to 7 hours a day, you can testify to the reality that you're always hungry, right? So Don and Candace have made Subway® the destination of choice for this bike ride. They're committed to finding Subways® all across the country and so far so good.

Candace writes of this day in Phoenix, Arizona, when Don found the Subway® first and, in the time honored tradition of bicyclists, you eat what is at hand not what someone might be bringing you an hour later, so he ate at the subway he found while Candace was buying him a sandwich at another Subway® there in Phoenix. She shows up with the sandwich and the soda and Don has already eaten. So she looks around and she sees a guy with a guitar, the case open at his feet, playing music – singing hymns, in fact – to anyone who might walk by. So Candace offers him this bread and this cup, which he gratefully received. And then, with this African-American musician, Candace enters a conversation that she has committed herself to about race. And, before she knows it, she is talking to this stranger not only about race and privilege but also about *Jesus*. He starts telling her about how in a near-death experience he *met* Jesus and came to a mystical realization that all of us are connected in spirit and that in some sense God is One. And he committed himself then from that point on to taking his guitar out in the street and singing hymns to the people who passed by. Wow.

Candace writes about that conversation, what I imagine Luke might have written when these guys from Emmaus came running back to him to tell them a story of meeting someone on the road. "As I write this," she describes, "I'm aware that in describing this person I can make it easy for others to turn him into some kind of cartoon, a street fanatic, someone who's kind of a joke. But he was not a joke to me. On the contrary, when he spoke of the soul and the way Jesus had pursued and continues to pursue him, it animated my own sense of the Divine." From the heart to the heart, right? "Mystical experience," Candace writes, "is not only real in my life but central to it. When I meet up with others who also testify to the unbounding unceasingly love-filled ways in which someone comes to them, it's like finding new family members. Phew. It's like finding new family members when we testify to the way someone comes to *us* in love.

So we go back to this 2000-year-old story of two travelers on the road to Emmaus three days after their teacher had been executed. And on that dusty road *out* of Jerusalem they were traveling. Maybe from fear. Maybe they didn't know what would come next. Maybe they were just giving up and going home. But the interesting thing about Emmaus: nobody really knows where it is. It is not a particular geographical place someone can point to and say, "Seven miles from Jerusalem; they were heading there." So let's just say it this way: They wanted to be anywhere but here. So off they went.

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And on the way they are talking, maybe wondering, "What could Jesus have meant with those blessings of the poor and the hungry," and, oh, my goodness, "blessed are those who mourn – and don't we mourn. What could he have meant when it ended this way?" Maybe they were speculating about that statement he had made, "Sometimes you have to lose your life to find it." But what kind of life were *they* going to find? And while they're talking and walking, a stranger appears, starts walking with them. Now let me tell you – maybe you know this – strangers appearing on a journey, that's a story as ancient as Abraham and Sarah and older still than that. When a stranger shows up, pay attention! When a stranger shows up, you have a choice to make, and right there is their first choice.

I have to tell you what ... This is an aside. Take a deep breath. When a preacher is ready preach a sermon, she carries it in her heart and on her mind wherever she goes. And last night I went to the Clyde theater on Whidbey Island and saw the movie "Beauty and the Beast" – great diversion for a Saturday night. And I was looking forward to the movie and I had no idea at the beginning of that movie a *stranger* shows up at a ball with a message and the prince doesn't listen to the message – and that's how the story starts. So you see the stories are everywhere! You can't get away from them.

This stranger shows up to these two travelers, and right there they have their first choice. Maybe they were remembering when Jesus met a stranger at a well – the woman from Samaria – how Jesus engaged with her in deep conversation, how they together came to some kind of truth, when all the disciples would've said, "Jesus, don't even talk to her." Maybe they remembered that. But for some reason, instead of pulling back in fear and letting the stranger remain a stranger, they started walking in step. They started talking about what had happened. Maybe they talked about their fears. Maybe they talked about their questions. But somehow by taking this stranger seriously, they heard something profound about what they've been learning for those years of walking with Jesus.

Didn't you *know* this is the path? Didn't you *know* this is where it would take you? Couldn't you *see* the Messiah was right there with you? And then the story says, they came to an end. – And right there they have another choice to make, because the stranger is going to keep going. What do we do? Maybe they remembered a time when Jesus said, "You know, I was hungry and you fed me. I was out in the cold and you welcomed me in. I was on the margin and you brought me to the center." And they said, "Lord, we never saw that!" And Jesus said, "When he did it to the least of these, you did it to me." Hmm. Maybe they remembered that and they welcomed the stranger in. "Stay with us it's evening. It's dark. We're scared. You might be scared. Come stay with us." So the stranger comes in a sit down for a meal. And they wonder if there will be enough to eat. And maybe they remember a time when Jesus sat down with a meal with 5000 people and only a few fish and some loaves of bread. Maybe they remembered when he took the bread and broke it and there was enough to feed everyone. For whatever reason, the story tells us is when this stranger took the bread broke it and gave it to them, they recognized Jesus. And then like every good stranger story, he disappeared from their midst. Because the story reminds us *every* stranger who takes bread and breaks it is an invitation to meet Jesus – on a street in Phoenix or out on a street in Seattle.

You know, next week we will gather here. We will have bread and a cup right here. We will break bread. And some of us might imagine we will meet Jesus right here.

But I want to tell you, Jesus is out there. And *this* week I want to invite you to practice meeting Jesus there. That stranger who you imagine has nothing to tell you? Talk and listen. That person you

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imagine you might have nothing in common with? Open your heart. That Resurrection walk those two travelers were on did not end with the breaking of the bread: it started again. It was the path they were already on when they walked with Jesus. And when they stepped from Jerusalem. And when they made each choice at the fork in the road. So when we come next week to gather, we will know it was Jesus walking with us, all the time. All the time.

This week, may the ears of our ears be open.

This week may the eyes of our eyes see.

Congregational Response, musical ("I thank you God")

Now the ears of my ears awake

And now the eyes of my eyes are opened.

Now the ears of my ears awake

And now the eyes of my eyes are opened.

Prayer Response

For the Word of God in Scripture,

For the Word of God among us,

For the for the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God.

UCUCC: CF

Transcribed by Beth Bartholomew from www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2017/5/04/2017