

“A matter of the heart”

Frank T. Griswold reports, “The **heart** is not simply a physical organ or seat of emotions; it is the core and center of our personhood as well.” Griswold continues, “**According to Jewish tradition, the heart is the throne of God’s glory, which is the place where ... the presence of God, most deeply is to be found.**” Griswold deduces, “Therefore, when Paul in the Letter to the Romans speaks about the love of God being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us, he is speaking of God’s reality breaking through to the inmost chamber of our own reality.” Griswold concludes, “**We experience it then as a unified and transfiguring and transforming love.**” (LISTENING WITH THE EAR OF THE HEART by Frank T. Griswold)

I use that quote from Griswold because in today’s Scripture there are several portions of it, which include the word, “*heart*”. After the Risen Jesus started walking with his two followers, he listen to their description of the events, which had taken place during the previous week – we call it Holy Week and Easter. It seems Jesus was so frustrated with their failure to comprehend the meaning of all that had happened to him that he finally blurted out, “*How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said!*” Now, some among us may have noticed the lack of the word, “*heart*” in that verse. The reason it was missing is because the translators for our pew Bibles chose to explain what Jesus said without literally reporting a Greek word, which Luke used in his Gospel. So, it might be helpful to consider the more literal translation of the Greek words Luke included in that verse. The actual Greek states, “*And he said to them: ‘O foolish ones and slow in heart to believe in all things which spoke the prophets.’”*

So, we see our pew Bibles’ translation sought to use the metaphor or image of “*How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe*” in place of the literal Greek words, “*O foolish ones and slow in heart to believe*”. Recall how Griswold said, “According to Jewish tradition, the **heart** is the throne of God’s glory, which is the place where ... the presence of God, most deeply is to be found”, so the Risen Jesus was truly raising a **matter of the heart** from the Jewish theological point of view, as he walked with his two mourning disciples toward Emmaus.

What does this metaphor of a **matter of the heart** mean? Jesus wanted his followers, including the two he was walking with, to have their **hearts changed** – to **become transformed** – to **live the New Life in the Risen Christ** – to **live out the New Relationship with God** – the relationship of being **reconciled with the Divine Parent through the Almighty’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love and Forgiveness!**

After the Raised Christ said, “*O foolish ones and slow in heart to believe in all things which spoke the prophets*”, he elaborated, as our pew Bibles report him saying, “*Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?*”

It is very important we note the Risen Jesus’ emphasis was on his fulfilling his purpose by being **God’s Suffering Servant**. Luke understood the crucial nature of Jesus’ **matter of the heart**, through which Jesus calls all of his followers to also be **self-giving servants of God**. Luke shared the Raised Christ revealed some specific examples of his tasks, writing, “*And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.*”

It is a powerful testimony to Jesus’ humility, that even when he was the Risen Christ and the Son of God, he revealed what the Messiah had to fulfill – the **Suffering Servant role**, in accordance with what was described in the writings of the prophets and of Moses. Jesus did that without disclosing he was, in fact, the Raised Jesus! The two disciples of Jesus only realized his identity when, that evening, they asked him to stay with them and they started to share a meal with him.

Luke explained, Jesus said *“the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight.”* The Risen Jesus did not pompously declare, “I am Jesus and I am raised!” Instead, he let the words and actions he had used to unite himself with his followers and they with each other do the disclosing of his true identity.

As an aside, these two disciples of Jesus were not among the twelve male disciples, who shared in the Last Supper with him. They did not have personal knowledge of the “words of institution” for Holy Communion, unless the Last Supper was not the first time, only the last time Jesus shared the sacrament with his followers during his earthly life. In the Gospel of John, it is reported Jesus, while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, announced the requirement of sharing in the ritual we have come to call Communion. I suspect Cleopas and the other disciple, who traveled on the road to Emmaus with the unrecognized and Risen Jesus, had shared many times in the special meal of commitment and identity, which we now call Holy Communion.

The gospel tells us how these two put the whole experience together, following the revelation of the identity of their traveling companion. Luke wrote, *“They said to each other, ‘Wasn’t it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?’”* It would have been good, if they had said something about their hearts, so we would have a better understanding of their experience being boiled down to a **matter of the heart**. Well, again, the translators of our pew Bible chose to not literally translate the Greek text, even though the Greek includes the word for *“heart”*. The more literally accurate for this verse, King James’ Version, states, *“And they said to one another: Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?”*

After hearing their sad account of the Holy Week and Easter events, the Risen Jesus challenged the slowness of their hearts and then revealed how the Messiah had to be **God’s Suffering Servant** – just as the prophets and Moses had said. The Risen Son of God reminded the two very concretely how he fulfilled his purpose of being the **ultimate manifestation of God’s Self-Giving and Suffering Love and Forgiveness** through the words he spoke **as he broke the bread**. Then, at the conclusion of their experience with the Raised Messiah, the two disciples realized **their hearts had been changed – they were transformed – their hearts were on fire!** It was a **matter of the heart** for them and it continues to also be so for you, me, and anyone, who is receptive of **God’s Loving Presence!**

Kate Huey says of this type of experience, “these resurrection appearances are powerful stories of community, of believers, doubters, and strugglers gathering and breaking apart, and gathering again, coming together and telling the stories of their experiences, sharing their memories of Jesus – his acts and his words – and then, like people of faith today, shining the light of Scripture on that experience and coming to new understandings. But that’s not all.” Huey continues, “They sit down at table together and break bread, and often, more than intellectual understanding,” **“they come to see with their hearts what was right before them.”** Huey asks, “What are stories from your own life, when your eyes were opened because someone welcomed you, or **because you opened your heart**, your door, your life, to a stranger, someone you didn’t expect to be a blessing?”

Helping us move to the implications of what this **matter of the heart** means for our response on this **Personal Dedication Sunday**, Huey asks, “How does God still speak to you today, not only through the encounter these early Christians had with Jesus, but through your own encounter with Jesus, in the breaking of bread, the sharing of stories, the study of Scripture? We’re not just hearing/reading a story about something that happened to others, long ago and far away.” Huey concludes, **“It’s happening here, today, in our lives, too, if we open our eyes and see, and then maybe our hearts, too, will burn within us.”** (Weekly Seeds “Breaking Bread/Companions on the Road” Reflection by Kate Huey) Amen.