

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
Third Sunday of Easter
April 10, 2005

Are You a Mystic?

Luke 24:13-35

The title of today's sermon is a question I want you to ask yourself:

Are you a mystic?

We'll get to that in a few minutes, but first we need to take a trip together.

Today's sermon is not in the conventional style.

Instead, I want to invite you into a time of *guided meditation* on the Word.

because

today's gospel story is really meant to be experienced, more than just heard.

You'll need a couple of tools for the journey through this text,

and you can find them close at hand: a pencil or pen, and some paper.

The pencil in your pew, and any blank space you can find in the bulletin, will do.

Listen, now, for God to speak to your heart:

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus,
about seven miles from Jerusalem...*

Perhaps you are on a journey.

Is there some future, some goal, some dream you are seeking after, working to attain?

Or perhaps you are wandering on your journey, feeling aimless, lost, confused?

Or, it could be that instead of going toward something,

you are running away from something, or someone?

Take a moment and write something about your journey.

Where are you going? What is ahead of you? What is behind you?

Is it easy or arduous? Pleasant or a hardship?

*Two of them were going to ... Emmaus...and talking with each other
about all these things that had happened...*

Who are your closest companions on your journey?

Who else knows something about where you are going and what you are hoping for?

Or what you are running from?

Can you name one, or two, or at most three people,

who are sharing with you on your journey these days?

Write their names, or just their initials, on your paper.

*While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,
but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*

Have there been times on your journey so far
when you have felt God's absence?
Have there been times when you felt you needed the presence of Christ
but instead you felt alone, weak, vulnerable, threatened?
Consider how your daily journey might be different, at work, at home, at school,
if you were really aware of Christ walking beside you.

*And Jesus said to them,
"What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"
They stood still, looking sad.*

Have you ever been forced to stop and look fully into what actually is?
We can run pretty fast, and believe that we are staying a few paces ahead
of the reality that chases us;
but when we are made to stop, and look at reality,
what do you see, and what do you feel, when you stop and look?

...Jesus of Nazareth... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
What have you been hoping God would do for you? or for the world?
Have you been disappointed with God?

Write this down

*Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.
Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.
They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there,
they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels
who said that he was alive.
Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said;
but they did not see him."*

What is it that you still do not understand about what is going on in your life?
What would you like God to explain a little better for you?
What confuses you?

*Then he said to them,
"Oh, how foolish you are,
and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!
Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things
and then enter into his glory?"
Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets,
he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

What part of the gospel message seems hardest for you to accept in your situation right now?
How is your understanding of your life and of the world challenged by Jesus?

*So Jesus went in to stay with them.
When he 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.*

Have there been times on your journey, when you have recognized God's presence?
Have there been moments, or conversations, or happenings, or feelings,
that assured you that Christ is walking alongside you?

*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?"*

Have you ever had an experience in your life of faith,
in which your heart was warmed? in which you felt the fullness of God's presence?
Or a time of deep reassurance, in which you knew yourself to be held firmly
by the steadfast love and wide mercy of God?
Or a time in which the purpose of your life, and your place in the world,
came into sharp focus in your mind and made sense?

*That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem;
and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.
They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!
Then they told what had happened on the road,
and how he had been made known to them
in the breaking of bread.*

It is of deep significance, that when these disciples recognized the presence of Christ,
when they were inspired by his teaching, by the truth of his Word,
they were urged, moved, to return to the fellowship of other believers,
where they could share their experience of their risen Lord.

Life in community with others of Jesus' followers;
this sacred fellowship,
is the norm for Christian living – Christian community is indispensable.
How do you benefit from the closeness of other believers who journey with you?

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Here in this story, we see the nature of our relationship with God.
A life of following Jesus means a life of encounter with the Word of God,
the written Word of God,
and the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us.
These encounters cannot be manufactured or controlled,
but must be attended to
as they are perceived by the eyes of faith.

As these two disciples discovered,
There is more to Christian growth than merely understanding with the mind.
There is a deeper, spiritual connection with Christ,
that makes our hearts burn within us,
that lifts us into a certain knowledge of God's eternal love.

There is the experience of the sacraments,
in which the sight of bread being broken,
the smell and taste of the bread and the juice,
together with the sound of Jesus' words
and the touch of the sacramental elements
brings us into deep communion with the living Christ.

There are other moments in which life becomes sacramental,
when the trees, the sky, the stars and moon and sun,
the hand we hold, the mouth we feed, the body we comfort,
the sound of a voice, the dropping of tears onto the cheek,
the twinkle of love in the eye.
are infused with the very presence of Christ.

These are the experiences of a Christian mystic.
When the presence and power of God are recognized by the whole person -
with the senses, with the mind, with the emotions, with the spirit,
and within the intricate dance of relationships.

Even John Calvin calls us to this deeper form of dwelling in God.
For after understanding the Word, he says,
"It now remains to pour into the heart itself what the mind has absorbed.
For the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain,
but when it takes root in the depth of the heart..."

The Christian mystic is the one who encounters God in a way that is beyond
the mere intellectual grasp of ideas,
but that is open to a real power that is really present, right now.

Or, as Graham Standish has said,
Christianity as a purely intellectual pursuit is like eating dry crackers,
while the experience of the Christian mystic is that of taking a drink of water,
which moistens the dry bread of the crackers
so they can be swallowed and give strength.

The Christian mystic lives with
"a listening awareness that allows the Word to take root in the heart
and transform it."

(Wendy Wright, *Seasons of a Family's Life*)

And as this Word grows in the heart,
it becomes more than a verbal experience,
more than letters joined together to make a meaning;
in the heart of the Christian mystic

the Word comes alive,
as it once came alive in the flesh and blood of Jesus.

Are you a mystic?

Anyone who seeks the presence of God in the midst of the everyday;
Anyone who believes that Christ is as near as the next human being,
the food that we eat, the world that we perceive all around us;
Anyone who seeks the fellowship of believers,
and finds in that fellowship the same Spirit
who created the heavens and the earth
and the same powerful love that raised Jesus from the dead;
Anyone who journeys from the empty tomb into the future,
and expects to see Jesus, believing he is still at work out there in the world;

Anyone like this, is a mystic.

I invite *you* to the life of a Christian mystic;
to enjoy sweet communion with the risen Christ in all your moments
and to seek joyous fellowship with those who tell the story
of what God has done for the world
on Easter Day.