

Connie Stinson

“Then He Opened Their Minds”

April 6, 2008

There’s an indescribable intensity and sense of heightened importance to a conversation when you know you’ll never, *or you might not ever*, see a person again, or at least for a long time. There’s an economy of words. You say what you mean and you mean what you say. Less time is wasted thinking about what to say and how to say it. You just say what needs to be said.

Personal examples from my own lifetime include all the final moments we had with my son Tim before he was deployed to Iraq, and his two-week leave time home in the middle of that terribly difficult year. Every minute counted because of what was going on inside of each one of us. Within my own self there was a constant battle between bitter and sweet, fear and courage, elated gratitude and desperate petition.

Other personal examples include the last hours and even moments of my own father’s life. I count it a sad but rare gift to have been the only one with him before he died twelve years ago. The fact that he was conscious and talking helped ease the parting for both of us. I still remember every word he said. And I remember another parting in my family when words were particularly painful and remembered well, largely because of the resentment caused---a conversation between my mother and her sister (my aunt) when my mother just had to say what was on her heart regarding my aunt’s marriage to my uncle. My uncle had a drinking problem and knowing she would not have another opportunity for a long time to be in the personal presence of her sister, my mother said what she meant and she meant what she said: that she would support her sister 100% if she divorced my uncle because of his alcoholism! Those words caused a rift in their relationship for years because my aunt had had no intention of divorcing my uncle Bob. While Uncle Bob eventually stopped drinking and became a changed man, time would reveal that my own mother’s advice to her sister might have been the result of her own pain. Years later she divorced my father because of the toll his alcoholism had taken on their marriage.

Yes, heightened, deepened, and often well remembered meaning in the words of parting conversations between those who love one another. This is the context for our Scripture passage this morning, for it provides other examples of intense conversation when emotions peaked and at the same time were likely all over the map. Every word was undoubtedly heard, remembered, and cherished in heart for as long as the mind would allow the memory.

I have shared a few personal examples in an effort to get you to consider some that you might have experienced in your own life.

So in our collective effort to imagine what it must have been like for those disciples to be with Jesus in those final weeks, let us all remember how it's been for us in possibly similar, though only human, circumstances. I know that when we lose a loved one, it is only normal and natural to at some point try to remember precisely what our last words spoken to one another were. And when saying good-bye for a long time to a loved one, the words *I love you*, even if not spoken often during ordinary time, are often the only ones that seem important. These are the kinds of human facts about which we are sure. That might inform how we understand today's story.

Two clarifications pop out at me as I read this passage from my own personal perspective that contains "good-bye" memories:

The first is about the **glory** Christ speaks of in vs. 26 of Luke, chapter 24. Remember that the very nature of the heightened intensity between the disciples and Christ could also indicate that the disciples' minds and hearts were even more open, more vulnerable, more receptive than at any other times spent with Christ. Take for example, Christ's question to Cleopas and his companion, "...was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"(v.26)

We know that this was Christ's response to Cleopas' own question, which revealed Cleopas to be somewhat uninformed about the transformation that had taken place among the multitude at the cross. I refer of course to his question vs. 18, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" One biblical scholar says that Cleopas' lack of understanding of Christ's **glory** was revealed in his question, and that was why Christ responded the way he did.

The irony here, important for us to note because we know something Cleopas doesn't know: that this is CHRIST. And that later after Cleopas puts it altogether, this will become one of those intense, intimate conversations he'll forever cherish in his heart, for he'll soon recognize how their hearts were burning! But for now, thanks to Luke's excellent ability to spin a story, we are caught up in the suspense of it all!

Let's take a closer look at this idea about **glory**. Cleopas mildly criticized (this stranger he didn't know was really) Jesus for being the only person in Jerusalem ignorant of what had just happened in the city. Cleopas tells the stranger/Jesus about the works of Jesus, the crucifixion and even the resurrection, but Cleopas does not mention the great corporate act of repentance, which is why Jesus responds to Cleopas' disappointment with His further question, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Glory, in our contemporary thinking, has to do with praise and adulation of the kind that is offered to a military commander who wins a great battle. But here let us remember that the glory to which Christ refers, is attached to suffering.

Remember the agony of rejected love that Jesus endured throughout his ministry as he came to his own and his own received him not. In his life and death Jesus managed to

cope with the unfathomable alchemy of suffering and transform pain into *kabod* (Glory). The root of the Hebrew behind the Greek word for **glory** has to do with wisdom, weight, reliability, strength of character, and the ability to overcome. Aeschylus, who in the 5th century B.C. fought at the Greek Marathon, understood a part of this mystery about **glory** when he wrote these words,

It is God's law that he who learns must suffer.

And even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart; and on our own, despite, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.

And Jesus' words to Cleopas go significantly beyond Aeschylus. For Jesus it is not merely wisdom that emerges from the Cross, but **glory**. In this text, the resurrected Jesus is talking. He has not merely received insight into the human predicament that can be called wisdom. He has reached beyond wisdom and entered into his glory. That **glory** includes victory over sin and death.

Christ's **glory**, the understanding he wants Cleopas (and us) to understand is not adulation and praise, but **deep-down**, weighty strength of character, heavy wisdom, and divine ability to overcome sin and death.

Do you see how a greater appreciation of Christ's **glory** can greatly enhance our own Christian understanding of it? If it is **glory** that God our Savior wants us to understand, let us embrace this victory over sin and death.

If we allow ourselves to enter into the suffering, we will have the capacity to experience the **glory**.

My father's dying affected me greatly. After my parents' divorce, I too separated from my father, and I justified the turning of my back and the shutting down of my emotions by reminding myself consistently that his alcoholism was destructive to me and to my own marriage and to my then young children I was trying to raise in as healthy an environment I could provide for them. But there came a day when I asked for prayer for this broken relationship. And somebody did pray. And then the one who had prayed for me asked, "Is there anything good that came out of that brokenness?" I thought yes, after everything said and done, no matter how painful some of that has been, at the root of it all, I know he loves me...I never doubted that. Then the prayer asked, "After all this time (years by then) is there anything YOU can do to help mend the brokenness?" Well, now I was starting from a different place, realizing that my own assurance of my father's love was more than a lot of people got in a lifetime, so the second answer came easier. "Yes," I thought, "It's time to go to him, and at least acknowledge the love."

For me, that was **glory**. For two years before he died, I had peace about the relationship with my dad. He didn't stop drinking, he was still a mess, but I loved him and he loved me. Of that we were both sure. And I would have never known the personal **glory** if it hadn't been for Christ's **glory** spoken of here to Cleopas.

One other personal clarification received from this passage is all about Christ's **resurrection** and the **invitation** we have to almost enter into its reality.

WE have to acknowledge that Luke has Jesus "in and out and all about," throughout these scenes. Luke is celebrating Easter in the sense it was meant to be celebrated, with hope and promise, clothed in mystery that is not really necessary to understand, but just accept. Furthermore, this story, in the best sense, could be called "a faith legend." The risen Jesus appears and just as suddenly disappears. That's because we are not in the realm of a literal understanding of resurrection which would have Jesus brought back to life (like Lazarus), living a normal life. It is not that Jesus was hiding behind the bushes and slipped in behind and then beside these two disciples while they were walking with his face half veiled to avoid recognition. It was not that he slipped out the door later while they were not looking.

Luke invites us to imagine something more mysterious: a materializing and dematerializing risen Jesus who makes appearances and then vanishes. This was consistent with how the early traditions understood Jesus' resurrection - and our own. It is the same person, embodied, but now transformed or transfigured into a new way of being and being embodied. Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians 15 as being a spiritual body.

Whatever actual experience may lie behind the story, it is now an invitation. It invites us to join the journey. A nice creative tension develops as they wander down the road. It arises because the reports of the women had not convinced the disciples. So Luke's congregations, hearing the story, know the resurrection had taken place. They knew that whatever actual experience lied behind the story, it was now an invitation. A journey requiring exploration, thinking, new input to enter. It was and is a journey that requires an "opening of minds."

When Jesus comes on the scene Luke probably intends us to imagine some divine control preventing recognition, rather than a ploy on the part of Jesus. I have already emphasized the fact that their conversation prompts us to recognize the central truth: a **glory** acquired and known, bringing liberation for Israel, bringing, contrary to their fears that such had been forgotten, **hope** for all people everywhere, forever. Of course, such hope took on, and takes today, many forms, some military, some peaceful, but it underlies, and is central to, all of Luke's story. Luke envisions a future, which brings peace and liberation for Israel and all peoples: "Peace on earth!" "Good news for the poor" will become a reality.

The surrealism of the Christ being an “invisible man” invites us beyond preoccupation with historical reconstruction to engagement with one another in Christ’s presence. Luke’s depiction of Easter is pointing to an abiding reality and inviting us to the same journey and to the same table. When Luke reports their realization that their hearts were burning, he doubtless wants us to be able to affirm the same, both as we understand scripture and as we hear his story.

This morning I remember the words from vs. 24 “Then he opened their minds” as I remember how my own father here on earth involved me in his own dying process. He even asked “Is it okay to go now?” to which I said “Yes, Daddy.” As I sat by him I felt like a birthing coach. Helping him to be as comfortable as he could be while dying, a laborious process for him, I was his support. His words would have been difficult to understand on any other day, so soft and weak, but in the intensity and importance of the moment, I believe God enabled me to hear and understand them. So that I could be part of my father’s life and death, God opened my mind, and my heart was burning.

Today, I carry a modicum of understanding, a more opened mind to GOD, because of the **glory** and the **invitational** sense of the **resurrection** that is described in this passage and that has been personally experienced with my own father and in other life examples. I suspect that if you carefully examine your own life and your own circumstances, and weigh them against the mysteries revealed in this passage, you too will acquire understanding about a **glory** and **resurrection** that is all your own. Perhaps you can recognize pockets of life through which you have experienced GLORY and through which you too are **invited** to participate in new life.

All are invited to enter into this **glory**, this new life, and prepare to participate in the Lord’s Supper.