# A Sermon Rev. Thomas V. Abbott 4/23/17

**"Slow of Heart!"**

**Scripture Passages: 1) Psalm 116:12-19**

 **2) Luke 24:13-27**

 **3) Luke 24:28-35**

**October Sky:** Any movie that highlights a challenging Father/Son relationship usually tugs on my heartstrings in a strong way. The movie, October Sky, has been one of those movies.

 October Sky is set in a 1950’s coal mining town, and tells the story of Homer Hickman, who is captured by the frenzy around the Russians launching of the first spacecraft, Sputnik. The movie begins with scenes where the entire town is out on clear nights watching for Sputnik to pass over. Sputnik was all anyone could talk about, at least in the town of Coalwood. Some of you, no doubt, remember the buzz around the Russians beating us into space.

 Without much effort, we can easily remember many events, through history, that have become the talk of the town. Such is the case as we begin reading our passages from Luke today.

**The Emmaus Road:** “Now on that same day two of Jesus’ disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.” A few verses later, those two disciples, asked the heavenly, disguised Jesus, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

 Luke makes it clear that Jesus’ triumphal entry, his teaching in the Temple, his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, and now the empty tomb was causing quite a stir. Everyone was talking about it! Even people perceived as outsiders, strangers, were talking about it. We all know, what it is to live in a moment, when everyone is talking about the same event, the same situation, the same story. Such a moment describes the setting for “The Emmaus Road Story”. Can you put yourself in that moment, a moment where everyone’s minds and hearts are focused on the same event? Can you put yourself in that moment where everyone is talking about the same thing?

**The Hidden Jesus:** While the two disciples, interestingly only one is named and it is not a name we know from other lists of disciples, while these two disciples are walking to the town of Emmaus, a man joins them on their journey. The man is Jesus, but they don’t recognize him. Luke tells us, “Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

 Throughout the Gospel story, Jesus continually interacts with those who are blind. Blindness comes in many forms, and we observe a very common form of blindness here with these two disciples whose eyes are kept from recognizing Jesus.

 I want to take a moment to consider the cause of the blindness. What was keeping these two disciples from recognizing Jesus?

 Was his resurrected body, so different from his earthly body that they did not recognize him? Did God close their eyes to recognizing Jesus? Or did something about the disciples’ state of mind, or state of heart blind them? All are possibilities, but Luke gives clear direction a little further on in the passage.

 After the disciples thoroughly shared with Jesus, all that had happened to him, (Have you ever had that experience, where someone tries to thoroughly explain to you, what happened to you.) Can’t you just imagine what Jesus’ face might have looked like, or what was going on in his mind, as the disciples were explaining to him about his experiences? A rather magnificent picture isn’t?

 When the disciples were finally done, Jesus said to them, “Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!”

 It would seem that the disciples’ blindness was caused by their slowness of heart. This is the image I would like to encourage all of us consider, this image of being slow of heart. When we are slow of heart, it causes us to be blind.

**Slow of Heart:** In the movie, October Sky, Homer Hickam’s dad managed the local coal mine. Homer’s dad worked a lot of hours, and he was blind to the gifts of Homer. Homer’s dad was blind to the fact that God created Homer with significantly different interests, ideas, and gifts from himself. Many of us have lived through this exact experience with one or both of our parents. Many of us know the pain of living with someone who is blind to us.

 This happens not only with our kids, but with our marriages, with friendships, with co-workers, in the life of the church.

 Deb and I have been married for 32 years, so not as long as many of you, but a fairly significant amount of time. As Deb and I have been living out our married life we have discovered that we have more significant differences, than we thought, when we got married. Have you discovered that in your marriages as well?

 Have you also discovered that it doesn’t work very well if you stay blind to those differences? To stay blind, is to be slow of heart.

 Let me give you a simple example. I love to play bridge. Deb knows how to play bridge, but she doesn’t like bridge. I love to play golf. Deb knows how to play golf, but she doesn’t enjoy golf. To stay blind, to be slow of heart, would be for me to expect Deb to join in these activities even though she doesn’t enjoy them that much, and for Deb it would be slow of heart of her not to give me the freedom to find ways to participate in these activities that I enjoy.

 The fact is, in our relationships, we all have blindness caused by a slowness of heart, a slowness to put the other person before ourselves, a slowness to put ourselves in the shoes of someone else, a slowness to actually see what is before us.

 The two disciples in our story were spiritually blind because they were slow of heart in terms of their relationship with God. Jesus sought to heal their blindness, sought to speed up their hearts by interpreting the Biblical story for them and how it pointed to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

 One of the primary reasons we stay blind, that we continue to have a spiritually slow heart, is that we resist participating in the very activities that will bring us healing, that will bring us light, that will speed up our hearts. This is exactly what Eugene Peterson is saying in the quote at the beginning of the announcements and bulletin. Often, we allow the routines, the busyness, the selfish cravings, the frantic schedules of our lives to distract us from prayer, from reading Scripture with the purpose of listening, coming to worship open to encountering God, and from connecting with a spiritual mentor to guide us and reflect with us.

 We all know how easy it is to be slow of heart, in let’s say our marriages or our closest friendships. We know what is going to bring life to our marriages and our friendships, but we often choose not to do those very things because they take energy, creativity, time, sacrifice. We often choose to be slow of heart, with those people we are closest to in life, and we often choose to be slow of heart with the most important relationship of all, our relationship with God. We often choose the “bliss” of blindness. (Pause). Sad, but true isn’t?

 Well listen as Jesus’” interaction with the slow of heart disciples continues. **Read Luke 24:28-35**

**Hearts Burning:** As the disciples were eating with Jesus and they heard him bless the bread, then watched as he broke it, and gave it to them, they remembered, they remembered other moments where they had heard the same blessing and experienced the same breaking of bread and receiving of bread. In that moment of remembering their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

 These are true sacramental moments, when something clicks with us, a memory, an experience, an emotion and our eyes are opened and we recognize the presence and work of God in our lives. Can you begin to recall those sacramental moments for you, those moments when your eyes were opened?

 This sacramental moment is a beautiful and powerful moment for the two disciples and these moments are beautiful and powerful moments in our lives, and Luke shares an image with us, to help us grow in awareness of these sacramental moments. Luke wrote, “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?”

 As the two disciples walked with Jesus, and as he spent time reflecting on God’s word with them, their hearts burned even though they remained blind. This is very much like the “still small voice” that Elijah experienced. The Holy Spirit is always at work within us. The Holy Spirit is always speaking to us. The question, is whether we can learn to pay attention to that “still small voice”, or that “burning heart”. God is nudging us all the time, but often we choose to stay blind to that nudging.

**Conclusion:** After opening their hearts to Jesus, the two disciples joyfully ran back to Jerusalem to share the gift of their resurrection experience. Their slow heart, had changed to a joyful heart.

 I pray that as a congregation each of us will do some serious discernment about the state of our hearts! Do we have slow hearts, that lead to spiritual blindness? Are we choosing to participate in the spiritual practices that will awaken our slow hearts? Are we paying attention to when our hearts are burning because the Holy Spirit is speaking to us? Do we know the reality of a joyful heart because we have recognized the resurrected Jesus present and at work within us? Are we sharing our joyful heart with the world around us?

 Christ has risen. Death has been defeated. Abundant life has been laid before us. That is the reality, but do we have hearts ready to embrace that reality? Amen.