

Year A, The Third Sunday of Easter
April 30th, 2017
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Dull Minds and Burning Hearts

*Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! Your **dull minds** keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.*
Luke 24:25-27

In this amazing story, Jesus makes a descriptive assessment of his disciples and the human species by extension. He says humans are foolish and dull of mind. I don’t think he is criticizing the disciples; chiding them for not seeing sooner; shaming them for lacking in intelligence. I know that’s how I have always read it and it may be how manuscript copiers thought of it too. It could even be their way of thinking got captured in the way they translated the original text but as I look at it now, I am seeing a deeper truth. I think it’s a descriptive statement said in love along the lines of “Father forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” Jesus is using a very gentle tone full of compassion and in no way is he scolding them.

Of course they are dull of mind! They didn’t have the anthropological data needed to see reality accurately and Jesus is about to provide that. In fact, now that he is raised most of the work is already done and all he needs to do now is interpret its meaning for them. That’s why Jesus came and that’s why he is now making his appearance after the crucifixion. He is providing the missing piece in a way they can take it in.

Each one of us is dull of mind about the thing “hidden from the foundation of the world” until the message of the life, death and resurrection of Christ takes hold. Without the crucifixion and resurrection it is impossible for us to be anything other than dull of mind. That event was needed to reveal what we could not see before it and could never see on our own.

Our foolish and self-destructive actions grew out of the dullness of our minds. We weren’t able to see the way we build our fragile and temporary peace through sacrificing the vulnerable while hiding the innocence of our victims from ourselves. We have been doing this since the beginning when Cain killed innocent Abel.

Jesus said to them, “Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about.” The prophets told them that God didn’t need sacrifice; he wasn’t that kind of God. God wanted compassion and mercy, justice stripped of retribution and solely centered on

rehabilitation, but they couldn't believe it. Their anxious minds were dull with fear. Fear clouds thinking and reduces options. They dare not risk all and refrain from sacrifice. Surely God would be angry and retaliate if they did. The very thought of it flooded their minds with undefinable dread. No, dull of mind is not a statement assessing intelligence; it is a descriptor revealing profound and inescapable anxiety.

The Stranger asks, "Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" With bewildered faces the disciples have no answer. Why would Jesus need to suffer and enter into his glory to reverse the dullness of mind the disciples and all humanity were caught in? Because in his suffering he showed humankind what we do to each other. He allowed us to do to him what we do to each other so that we could see what we do. And so humanity killed Jesus thinking his death necessary and even God's will. The human species killed an innocent man who was the Son of God. We did this habitually and without understanding.

In our anxiety our minds became dull and we could not see our own propensity for violence that we siphoned into our victims. Our victims carried just enough of our violence for us to refrain from turning on each other and destroying our own community. Sometimes there weren't enough victims to absorb it all and we plunged into war. For this to work as well as it did we had to hide what we do from ourselves. We had to make our minds dull and fail to see what the prophets were telling us. Jesus came along and allowed this to happen to him so that we could see it. But then from the grave he rises showing us that God's love for us is bigger than our commitment to death dealing. Only the resurrection is powerful enough to overcome our resistance to seeing the truth about ourselves.

God knows that millions upon millions of innocent people have been sacrificed to human greed, envy, jealousy and violence. Perhaps they are the real "great cloud of witnesses" all witnessing to their innocence and the power of the resurrection as God lifts up those humans have put down. Their numbers are staggering and they come from all religions, races, ethnicities and gender identities. Their number is mounting by the day. We read about them in the news, picture them in our history books and see them on television. Some day we will be among them.

When the Stranger told them how to read their scripture, both the law and the prophets, as a story with Jesus' life, death and resurrection as its centerpiece and interpretive lens, he was giving them a tool for recovering their sight. He was in the act of giving them sharp minds not dulled by anxiety, unable to see the truth. Always before they had lived in fear of judgement; both from God and from each other. This was the moment he revealed the thing hidden since

the foundation of the world, since the beginning of culture; the underpinnings of religion. As he did this their hearts burned with clarity and excitement. Suddenly it all made sense. The missing piece to the puzzle fell into place.

This text makes it clear that Jesus did not assume the scriptures were self-evident or self-interpreting. They needed a key. This text has Jesus giving them the key. From this point forward their dullness of mind was beginning to lift. The profound anxiety that had gripped their lives began to evaporate. The fear of death that had them in its grasp was being relieved.

They caught a glimpse of something so exciting, so revelatory, and so salvific that their hearts burned. Their minds could not take it in but their hearts felt the implications and they knew they would be thinking about these things for the rest of their lives. It would take years for the dullness of their minds to totally dissipate but their hearts knew they were on the right track.

“When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying, ‘Stay with us.’” They weren’t ready for him to leave. They needed more time. They wanted to hear more. This Stranger was making sense of all the events they had just gone through. He was putting everything into a new light and it was life giving. Would he stay the night with them! Yes, and much more!

“So he went in to stay with them. After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight.”

“They recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight.” The moment the disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread, his bodily presence was no longer required as a condition of their new hope. The bond between them and the Stranger had become so intimate that already they were different people. The dullness was leaving them and in its place they felt their hearts burning.

After he vanished “They said to each other, ‘Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us.’” “They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem.”