

Easter tide, 2020
(Year A)

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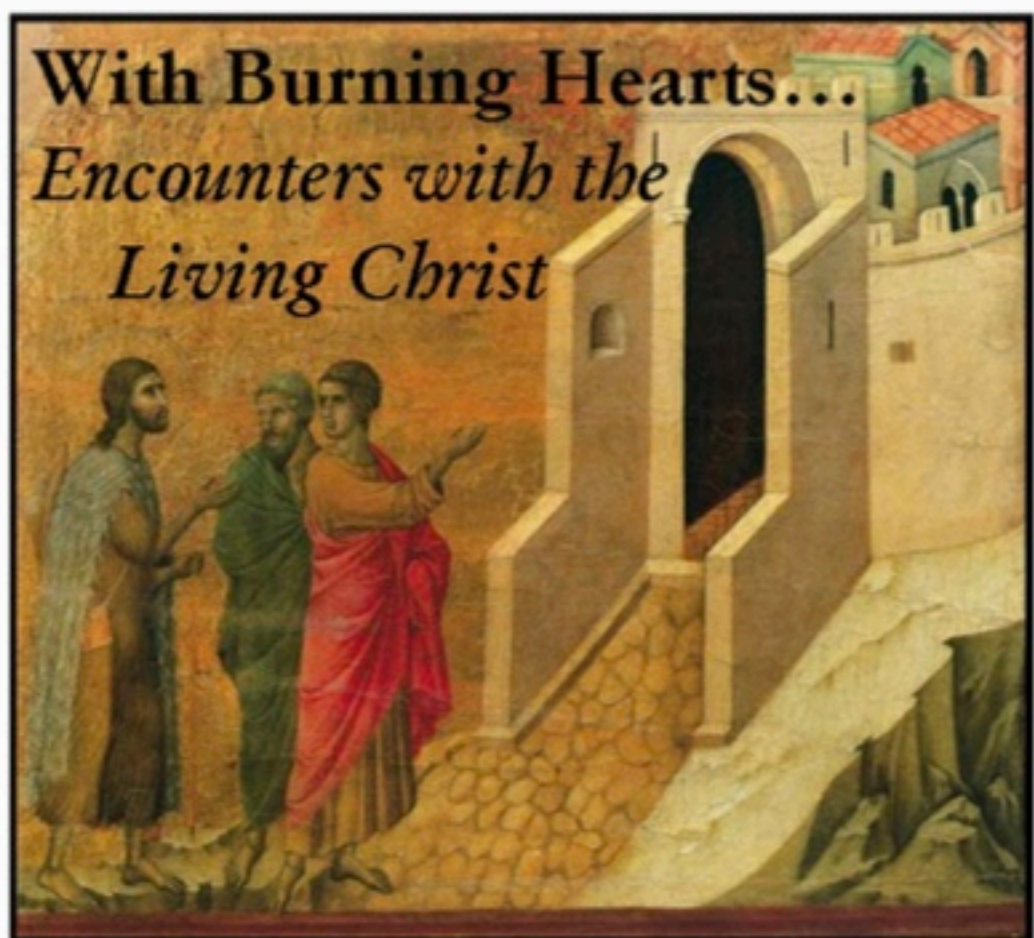
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With Burning Hearts...

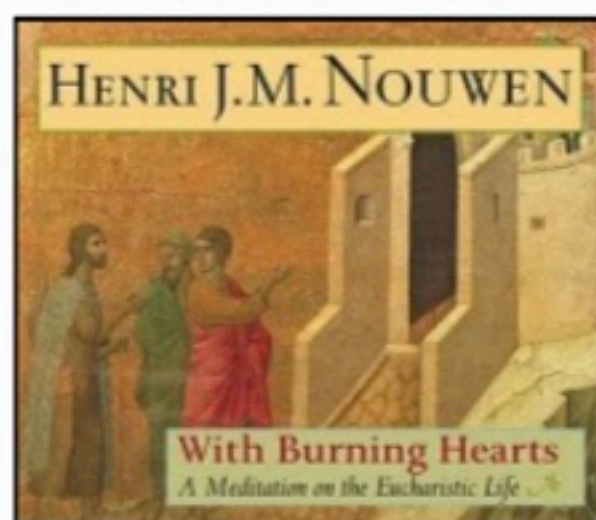
Encounters with the Living Christ

Introduction...

The theme for the 2020 Easter season comes from two places: First, Scripture, of course. The Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Easter is the “Road to Emmaus” passage in Luke 24. *You remember the story:* Two disciples of Jesus were traveling on the very day of the Resurrection and talking about the things they had seen in Jerusalem.

Scripture says, “While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them....” During their walk together, and in surely the most amazing Bible study that has ever taken place, “...beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” Later, when Jesus shared a meal 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. 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?’”

Henri Nouwen, the second source for our Easter theme, has written a wonderful book, *With Burning Hearts: Meditations on the Eucharistic Life*, that takes the Emmaus Road encounter and reflects on how we can live lives of broken dependence on Jesus. It’s a resource we encourage you to get. Surely an encounter with the risen Christ changes lives— surely we cannot walk with Jesus and not be changed.



Find more information about the Nouwen book, along with details about the artwork used throughout this booklet, on page 10.

What's the Point?

The point of this year's Easter season theme? Well, there are several things we can take from the Emmaus Road experience, but here are a few that you might like to think about:



- *Jesus stands among us in His resurrection power— and at times and in ways that we might not expect.*
- *We are often slow to see and hear Jesus even when He is standing among us.*
- *Jesus reveals Himself to us as He chooses.*
- *Jesus' word is authoritative because He is the Word made flesh. All Scripture points to Him.*
- *The ultimate worship experience we can have with Jesus is at His Table.*
- *An encounter with Jesus “burns in our hearts” and compels us to go out into the world to love and serve Him.*



So, look through the lens of the Emmaus Road as you focus on this Easter season. Ask how we can lead people to see and hear the risen Christ— how we can introduce them to the person and work of Jesus— and how their hearts can burn within them. And then, let's help our church be compelled by our Emmaus Road encounter to go forth into the world to love and serve Christ.

With Burning Hearts...

Encounters with the Living Christ

About Easter...

In the church year, Easter is a fifty day period of seven Sundays, beginning with Easter Day. Ascension Day, which marks that profoundly important moment when Christ ascended into heaven, comes forty days after Easter and is celebrated to affirm that Christ is Lord of all times and places. This extended season, traditionally called “Eastertide,” culminates at Pentecost. The season is designed for extended celebration, for exploring the ramifications of Easter for the redemption of all creation, and for joyful Christian living.



Second Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2020

Details: On this second Sunday of Easter, we see two very different encounters with the risen Lord: In the remarkable sermon of Peter, a first-hand account of his own encounter with the Messiah; and also in the remarkable scene in the upper room (behind closed doors) when Jesus stands among the disciples in His risen power. The passage in John is sometimes called “The Johannine Pentecost” because of the way that Jesus breathes upon the gathered assembly and commands them to receive the Holy Spirit. At least one truth we can see from today’s encounters: Meeting up with Jesus causes us to worship, and then to act. A true encounter with the living Christ brings about a commissioning: We are compelled to go and give witness to what we have seen and believed.

Scripture Foundations: Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020

Details: Today we come to the core passage of Scripture from which we take our Easter theme “With Burning Hearts”: The Road to Emmaus. In that most tender scene when the disciples’ eyes are opened as Jesus breaks bread, we are reminded that it is at Table—it is when we remember the Body of Christ—that we are most connected to Jesus in worship. It is when we break the bread and drink the cup that Jesus stands among us in his risen power.

But the encounter with Jesus—that tender scene of bread broken and cup taken—is not the end. It is because of our burning hearts that we “get up at once” and go share the news that Jesus is alive.

Scripture Foundations: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 3, 2020

Details: Our encounter with Jesus in today’s Scripture passages is likened to the relationship a shepherd has with his sheep. Of course, the Psalm for the day is one of the most well-known and loved biblical images of shepherding. Peter reminds us, in the epistle, that we are all sheep who go astray. It is when we return to the “guardian of our souls” that we find rest and protection. In the Gospel passage, Jesus spells it out clearly and simply, although He does not use the shepherd metaphor, but rather that of the gate. “I am the gate [for the sheep]. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” Did you know that in ancient times, a shepherd would actually become the gate for his flock? When out in the fields, particularly at night, the shepherd would find a place to corral his sheep. Then, he himself would lie across the opening to the enclosure, therefore using his own body to guard and protect his animals. The innocent sheep cannot leave the fold without waking the “gate”, and the thief or wolf cannot enter without doing the same.

Scripture Foundations: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; John 10:1-10

Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2020

Details: The miraculous encounter that Stephen had with Jesus was both beautiful and hopeful, but it came at a time that was ugly and seemingly hopeless. Stephen, one of the deacons chosen by the early Jerusalem church, was accused of blasphemy and brought before the council. When given the chance to defend himself, he preached a sermon

against his accusers, indicting them instead for their unbelief! They were furious, of course, and his vision of Jesus standing, the posture of judges rendering a verdict, only made things worse. And they killed him by stoning.

Sometimes being a witness to what we have seen and believe— our encounter with Jesus— is a pathway that leads through great sacrifice, even through the very valley of the shadow of death. The Psalm passage for today reminds us, though, where our hope and security comes from: “You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”

Scripture Foundations: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

Details: The passage in John for today is part of a larger section of Scripture that is sometimes referred to as “Jesus’ Farewell Discourse.” With these words to His disciples (who must have surely wondered about what this particular encounter with Jesus meant for His future and theirs) Jesus comforts His followers with a promise about sending the Holy Spirit. He assures them that He will not leave them “as orphans”, and then in one of most descriptive of passages where Jesus talks about His relationship to the Father, he says this: “On [the day the Spirit of Truth comes] you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” Somehow, all at once, Jesus is in the Father, we are in Him, and He is in us— perhaps the ultimate encounter with Jesus? But we must remember that the encounter is not the end game: Jesus promises the presence of the Holy Spirit, and He reminds us of our relationship to the Father through Him, so that we will obey His commandments and the whole world will know us by our love.

Scripture Foundations: Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

About Ascension Sunday...

The Sunday following the 40th day after Easter marks the day Christians traditionally commemorate the Ascension of Christ, also referred to as the Ascension of Our Lord. (Ascension Day itself, which occurs on the fortieth day after Easter, always falls on a Thursday). Sadly sometimes overlooked, the ascension of our Lord is of paramount importance in the Christian faith because it signals the earthly completion of God's saving work in Jesus, and the heavenly beginning of Christ's role at the right hand of Father. The gathered witnesses saw Jesus bodily ascend into heaven, demonstrating that He is there even now making intercession for us all. He is King, Priest, and Lamb all at the same time. It also establishes something about His return: "In like manner as you have seen him go, he shall come again!"



Ascension of the Lord, May 24, 2020

Details: It's not uncommon for pastors to focus on the Great Commission, for all of us are to devote our lives to the task of making disciples. But sometimes missed is the context of worship in which the Commission is given: There is a larger view, a bigger picture, when you read the entire passage: The disciples came to the place where Jesus told them to go—*He initiated the encounter*. They worshiped him (though some doubted). Then Jesus gave them some instructions— He gave them a word. And then, finally, they were compelled to return at once to Jerusalem "with great joy". Much like the Emmaus Road experience, the encounter with Jesus on the mountain of ascension ended with burning hearts and lives of action.

Scripture Foundations: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

About Pentecost...

After Easter, the church begins the observance of Pentecost, the festival commemorating the gift of the Holy Spirit. An extended season for reflecting on how God's people live under the guidance of His Spirit, Pentecost extends from the seventh Sunday after Easter to the beginning of Advent.

Pentecost symbolizes a new beginning. It celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the world and the empowering of the church to reach the world with the gospel. In celebrating Pentecost, the church expresses its gratitude for the faithfulness of Christ in fulfilling his promise to send "another counselor" (John 14:16); celebrates the work of the Spirit in renewing all of creation; professes its confidence in knowing the Spirit's power is available for its mission; and grows in awareness of the size of its calling to reach the whole world with the gospel.



The Day of Pentecost, of course, was not the first time the Holy Spirit appears on the biblical scene. As Christians, we believe that the Holy Spirit, together with the Son, were one and co-equal with God the Father even before the foundations of the earth were laid.

Day of Pentecost, May 31, 2020

Details: After their trip down the Emmaus Road, and their encounter with Jesus, the disciples' hearts burned within them. Now, on the Day of Pentecost, another holy fire burned. Jesus Christ stood among them in his risen power through the presence of the Holy Spirit. And, like that encounter at Emmaus, the presence of God lit a fire in these particular disciples, too. Peter, in the Acts passage, preaches with such power that thousands are added to the church that very day. How is the Spirit made present to you? The Psalm passage for today talks about the creative nature of the Spirit of God. Is He still creating— is He at work— even today?

Scripture Foundations: Acts 2:1-21; Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

For some context on the Spirit before Jesus' ascension, see these passages: John 20:19-23; John 7:37-39

About Trinity Sunday...

While every Christian worship service is a celebration of the Trinity, Trinity Sunday explicitly focuses on the mystery, power, and beauty of the triune God. Our Christian identity and mission are given to us as we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Our worship is not only directed to the triune God, but is also enabled by the prompting of the Holy Spirit and centered on Jesus Christ. At its best, our worship is also an expression of the unity and common purpose of the church, which Jesus prayed would reflect the unity between himself and God (John 17:20-21). We are one (or at least should be) because our triune God is one.



Trinity Sunday, which is traditionally celebrated one week after Pentecost, reinforces the truth that all three persons of the Trinity exist together from eternity to eternity. Where other special services, such as Christmas, Good Friday, and Pentecost, are tied to specific, important events, this celebration is linked with an important doctrine, which is itself a summary of scriptural teaching about God's being.

Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020

Details: The Easter season, and our Emmaus Road journey, comes to an end with a miraculous encounter with Jesus: That of the Trinity. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine; one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In today's Bible passages, we see several great texts that point to the nature of the Godhead: We see the eternal community of the Trinity in Creation in Genesis; we see our relationship with the Sovereign in Psalms; and two well-known examples of Trinitarian witness in the New Testament.

Scripture Foundations: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Resources...

Nouwen, Henri, J. M. *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life* (Orbis Books, 1994).

Webber, Robert E. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality Through the Christian Year* (Baker Books, 2004).



The **artwork on the cover** of this booklet is a detail from a larger work by Duccio di Buoninsegna that dates from about 1308. The work is titled “The Road to Emmaus” and shows the moment in the Bible story when the two disciples ask Jesus to “stay with us, for night is falling.” It is in the encounter in the home, while eating together, that the disciples recognize Jesus “in the breaking of the bread.”

Other images used in this booklet:

The Harrowing of Hell. Fra Angelico. Page 4.

The Ascension of Christ. Traditional icon. Page 7.

Pentecost. Ian McKillop. Page 8.

The Trinity. Anton Rublev. Page 9.

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