

Something in the Air
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Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know
the things that have take place? Luke 24: 18

The other day I walked into Hot & Crusty bakery and asked the counter person if I could have a lemon meringue pie. She looked at me for a second, then she started to dance. She said, “Meringue? You mean merengue!” Then she gave me my pie.

Next stop was the grocery store. I had two clerks working my line, and by the time I reached the counter they were both dancing to the Muzak, which was playing a lively cover of “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun.” I said “Wow, this is strange!” And I told them about the counter person at Hot & Crusty. One stopped dancing, shrugged and looked thoughtful. Then she smiled and said, “There’s something in the air!”

That day on the road to Emmaus, there was something in the air.

Two people, Cleopas and his friend (or maybe it’s his wife), are walking along, abuzz with the things that have been going on. And soon they are joined by a stranger who, as Cleopas says, must be the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn’t know about the things that have been happening in that town.

“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” asks Jesus. And Cleopas seems astonished to think that they could be talking about anything *but* the events of the past few days. Cleopas seems astonished to think that anyone could not know what they’d be discussing as they walked on the road from Jerusalem.

Luke gives us the impression that this city—a city that a week earlier was so puzzled by the arrival of a self-styled prophet from the countryside, a man riding a donkey and accompanied by gangs of kids—could **now** talk about nothing *but* him. How this man Jesus had led a movement that challenged the political patterns and the religious realities of the day, how he had been pulled from prayer by a traitorous kiss, abandoned by his hapless key leadership, sentenced to die by a feckless Roman governor, and tortured to death in public view, while everyone watched and no one did anything. According to Luke, there is something in the air. According to Luke, all that is now the talk of the town.

But it’s not the talk of this one stranger. This stranger has a one word response to Cleopas’s question: Ποῖα? (poia). It means, Huhhhh? It’s an invitation to be filled in, a request to be part of the conversation, an application to be included in the gossip of the day.

Ποῖα? Huhhhh?

We all like to know what's going on. We all like to be aware of the buzz of the moment.

I was discussing school gossip with a parent in the congregation. She said, "I really think the problem some parents have is that their kids' school is their life. They don't have something like a church community to be part of. I don't feel the same need to get into all the gossip at that school; that's what church is for."

I didn't say a word. I was afraid to!

Jesus doesn't seem to mind the gossip. Jesus doesn't seem to mind the buzz. He seems intrigued by the buzz. Intrigued to know that the things he's been through matter to people. That the things that have happened to him have happened, in a sense, to everyone.

Jesus seems glad to know that there is this ripple effect going on. And it's spreading out. Jesus seems glad to discover that the something in the air, is him.

Cleopas is only too glad to fill him in about everything. He tells this stranger all about their hopes and their disappointment. He shares with the stranger their confusion about the events of that morning: the empty tomb, the vision of angels, the rumors that have started to swirl. Rumors started by angels and spread by women. Cleopas seems troubled and confused by all this, as he tells this strange, clueless stranger that there is, indeed, something in the air.

But Jesus is not happy about Cleopas' reluctance to come to grips with this something that's in the air.

"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart!" says Jesus. Foolish: a word so often reserved for our reluctance to recognize the work of God. Slow of heart: read, dimwitted. Maybe willfully dimwitted.

Jesus is speaking with affection, but also with frustration. And he teaches them everything. He rewinds to Moses, he runs through the Hebrew prophets, he fast forwards to the events of the past few days and they still don't get it, they still don't see him, they still don't recognize him, and at that point, he is ready to move on.

With the risen Christ walking on the road beside them, they still don't get it! What hope do you and I have?

But here's what happens. One of the great moments in the Christian faith happens, and it's a quiet moment, a simple moment, an intimate moment. It's a moment you and I have sung about many times, maybe without realizing it.

Every time we've sung the great hymn, "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens, Lord with me abide."

It's a moment we sing about here at SPSA every time we sing, *Hamba Nathi*, "Come stay with us, for evening is nigh."

Those are Emmaus hymns, sung not just about this moment 2000 years ago when a couple of people remembered their nomadic manners and the Biblical teachings about how to treat a stranger.

Those hymns are sung about the times in our lives we remember to let this road-weary Christ into our spaces and our lives. Those moments that may be little and insignificant, and change everything.

"Don't leave," they say. "Come stay with us," they say. It's late, it's dark, you're tired and you're hungry.

And you know what happens next. He stays. He takes the bread. He blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them.

And all of a sudden, what they don't get while he's walking with them, listening to them, talking to them, explaining things to them, teaching them? What they don't get while all that is going on? they get now. They get it now. That something in the air? It's Jesus.

Their eyes are opened in the breaking of the bread.
 They see their friend in the breaking of the bread.
 They know who he is, in the breaking of the bread.
 They understand God's purpose in the breaking of the bread.
 They understand their lives, in the breaking of the bread.

Isn't that always the way it is? That's why we come together in this strange way, isn't it? That's why we share this loaf, kneel together, eat together, pray together while the bread is broken.

Because sometimes, not every time, maybe, but sometimes, enough times, something happens in us, too. And we know the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread.

Oh, after the fact these two disciples say to each other, "Wasn't your heart just on fire when he was talking with us, walking with us, teaching things to us and explaining things

to us?” And maybe their hearts *were* on fire. But somehow that fire wasn't quite enough. And somehow, the best way to know who someone is, then and now, is in the breaking of bread.

That's why we share the Lord's Supper. It's that sometimes, somehow, in the breaking of bread, in the sharing and caring and connecting, the risen Christ makes himself more obvious. The risen Christ makes himself known in us, and to us. In the buzz of communion, there's something in the air.

Remember who it is who tells us “Do this, and remember me when you eat. Because I am known in the breaking of bread.”

Let me finish the story. Because those two disciples don't stay there in Emmaus. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them and they recognize him, then he disappears. His work here is done, for the moment. He's busy. He's alive. He moves on.

But the disciples move on too. It's late, but they can't stay put! It's late, but they can't stay still! Not knowing what they know. Not knowing who they know.

They head back to Jerusalem.
And Luke doesn't say it, but I think they dance back.
All the way back.
Because there's something in the air.

Up above my head I hear music in the air; there must be a God somewhere!