**Eclipse of the Heart**

By Jeff McDowell

**4-14-24**

**Horseheads First UMC**

 **Psalm 4**

**1**Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
    ***You gave me room when I was in distress.***    Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

**2**How long, you people, shall my honour suffer shame?
    How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? *Selah*
**3**But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself;
    the **Lord hears when I call to him.**

**4**When you are disturbed, do not sin;
    ponder it on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*
**5**Offer right sacrifices,
    and put your trust in the Lord.

**6**There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good!
    Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!’
***7You have put gladness in my heart
    more than when their grain and wine abound.***

**8*I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
    for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.***

 **Luke 24:36-48**

**36**While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ **37**They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. **38**He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? **39**Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. ***Touch me and see;*** for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ **40**And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. **41**While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ **42**They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43**and he took it and ate in their presence. **44**Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ **45*Then he opened their minds to understand*** the scriptures, **46**and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, **47**and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48*You are witnesses*** of these things.

**Sermon Theme: Emotional Pain / Low Esteem / New Life in Christ**

Life after Easter continues, just like every year of our lives. Even before we were born, this momentous event changed our world and our ability to come boldly to the throne of God’s grace and find help. The light has come into the world through Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior. But we often live as though Christ was not raised from the dead. We live in darkness when there is light all around us, as during a solar eclipse. **We let the pain of our own sin convince us that God mainly wants to punish us instead of redeeming us.** Much of this low self-image comes from an inaccurate view of all that Christ has done for us. Easter tells us that Christ died for us when we were still sinners; that **we died to our old selves and live as new people.** Don’t let worry, unbelief or a focus on your weakness keep you in the dark. Come to the light of Christ shining brightly on you and believe that He is living inside you. The Eclipse of the heart is over. The Son is shining once again.

**Sermon Start:**

I have come across an old hymnal from the 1892 Protestant Episcopal Church. Here is the first verse of a hymn for the evening:

 ***The day is gently sinking to a close,***

 ***Fainter and yet more faint the sunlight glows;***

 ***O Brightness of Thy Father’s glory,***

***Thou Eternal Light, be with us now;***

 ***Where Thou art present darkness cannot be;***

 ***Midnight is glorious noon, O Lord, with Thee.***

We know the sun is always shining, even when it is obscured by the clouds. We hope it will always be shining on us. But too many things get in the way of its rays, especially when rain clouds roll in. Still, we trust that when it is overcast, soon we will see the sun again, **Unless there is an eclipse!**

Last Monday we all witnessed a fascinating sight: the sun was totally blocked out by the moon!

Unfortunately for most of us, ***that spectacle was eclipsed*** by cloud cover. All we could see in most areas (we were in Geneva, on Hobart and William Smith college campus) was the clouds. But at the appointed time of the total eclipse, everything was darkened, dark as night… and then quickly it returned to daylight all around us.

God’s wonderful creation is full of wonders to behold. But **like our eyes** during that eclipse, **our hearts can also feel a darkening.**

In that darkness we wonder, somewhere in the back of our mind (if we are being honest)

***“Will the Sun return, or will we be left in darkness now and forever?”***

In our spiritual life, we always want to be on God’s Good Side. We want to bask in the light as He is in the light. We hope it will always be simple to follow the *Lord of Life* and bask in His glow. But ***too many barriers*** to His light and warmth get in the way, especially when our own heart betrays us.

How does our heart betray us? **We forget** the reality of all that God has done in sending His son Jesus into the world, and **we wallow** in the worry of our own sins. **We feel** unloved. **We worry** that we have strayed too far, and don’t know how to return from our wandering. **We are unsure** how to get back to God, who first loved us and called us and led us forward into service in this world.

**For some of us, in our relationship with God, it is as if the eclipse came and the sun never returned again. And then, if we are not careful with our souls, we get used to the darkness.**

What am I talking about? **Spiritual darkness.**

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, that was the first time they chose not to walk with God in the cool of the morning; and they hid from Him!

That scenario has been repeated among humans ever since. When we feel guilty we hide from God, or avoid Him altogether. We feel ashamed, unworthy, dirty, and even worthless. We let darkness eclipse the light of God.

But the Bible says, ***“God showed His great love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”***

I propose today that many people do not live up to their full potential with God because they feel ashamed, unworthy, dirty, and even worthless.

***What do we actually have to show God to prove we want back into the light?***

***And that, in itself, is the wrong question.***

The Good News of Christ is NOT that we have something to show God to prove we are worthy of His love, of His light. ***The Good News is just this: God removes every barrier to His light and shines on us, changing our lives forever!***

The psalmist says it right:

*Vs. 1: “Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress!”*

*Vs. 8: “I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.”*

Are you hurting, ashamed, or feeling somehow separated from God? God is not finished with you yet. And God will give you the peace you seek. Like the psalmist in the Bible of old, call out to Him while he is still near and He will answer you!

This close relationship with God is provided to you by Jesus himself. **God seems too distant, like the sun: so far away. But Jesus has made God known.**

Much has been said over the years about Christ, which means Savior. Christ is not the last name of Jesus; it is his title! Jesus of Nazareth is how he would have been known here on earth for 33 years before his death. ***Some called him Christ***, but on earth he was known as ***Jesus of Nazareth*** (his hometown) and in his hometown he was called ***Jesus Bar Joseph***; bar meaning “son of.” He was identified, as all Jewish men then, by his lineage, his father, and if that was not enough, his father’s father. That is why the gospels begin with all those “begats.”

Matthew 1: 15 *Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,****16****and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.*

Lineage was important and it showed the family tree through the men. So, Jesus was human. You could trace his family tree all the way back to King David in the Old Testament times.

To know Jesus in his earthly existence was to know ***Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Bar Joseph.***

***Oh, you say, “I would have believed in Him if I had lived back then.” Would you really?***

Today’s gospel reading is from Luke in the New Testament, chapter 24. It is the story of Jesus walking on the road of Emmaus, post – resurrection. He died, he rose, and some knew about that but not everyone. A few had seen him since he rose from the dead, but not many. And stories were flying all around about what happened.

So Jesus meets two disciples walking a road toward a town called Emmaus.

Disciples on the Road to Emmaus did not believe he rose from the dead, until he proved before their eyes he was alive. Just after that, today’s reading, the other disciples talked about it but did not really believe until he appeared in their midst… and they said, “He is a ghost!”

They were still thinking on human terms. If he is here with us in the flesh (“let us touch his wounds”) then we will believe he Rose from the Dead!

Human belief. Human religious thoughts. Human relationships with Jesus. We must go beyond.

**Because Jesus was not *just* human. He was also the Son of God: *Divine.* He did not just die, he rose from the dead. He killed death. He threw eternal jail in jail.** (Ephesians 4: 8)

By becoming human, *he bridged the gap* between us and God. And now, we worship not just the human Jesus of Nazareth, but Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Savior, Jesus the Son of the very God who sent Him to us to show us the way, Jesus the light of the world! And the saving from our darkness is all up to Him!

*“So****faith******comes****from what is heard, and what is heard****comes****through the word of Christ.”* Romans 10:17

So now, what darkness are you living in?

* Grief over your own sins
* Unanswered prayers
* Feeling unworthy
* Loss of Purpose

Jesus answers you today like he spoke with the disciples that day, after he rose from the dead…

*“Peace be with you.*

*Why are you frightened?*

*Touch me and See.”*

Here is How to Come to Jesus, today, when he is not physically here.

1. Acknowledge that He is (he exists) and that He rewards you when you even attempt to believe. BELIEVE. Hebrews chapter 11 reads:

***6****And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

1. Decide not to sin DON’T WALK AWAY (separate from God) while you are “eclipsed” with fear. Instead, be silent so God can speak to you.

Psalm 4: 4 *When you are disturbed, do not sin;
    ponder it on your beds, and be silent.*

*“Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you.” I Peter 5:7*

1. Listen for Jesus’ voice… PRAY, OPENING YOUR HEART: in the Bible, by the Holy Spirit, and coming through other believers . . .

*“Whoever comes to me I will in now wise cast out.” John 6:37*

*“I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’” Luke 24: 49*

*“I am the bread of life.****Whoever******comes******to******me****will never be hungry, and****whoever****believes in****me****will never be thirsty.” John 6:35*

1. Share your experience / struggles / pains / hopes with another Christian. LEAN ON YOUR FAMILY IN CHRIST.

*Phil.* ***2****If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,****2****make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.****3****Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.****4****Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.****5****Let the same mind be in you that was[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-29380a)*] in Christ Jesus.”*