

The Little Big Things #10
Stuck and Unstuck
August 4, 2023

Today, I want to look at another “little big thing”.

Question: have you ever been stuck?

I have been stuck in a chair once, stuck to the ground when I stepped in tar. I got stuck under a car once working on a transmission. I have been stuck trying to figure out a problem. Stuck trying to know what Barbara would like for a birthday present.

Sometimes I have even been stuck after I thought that I had everything figured out.

Show DVD from “Finding Nemo” when all the fish escape.

Now what! What a great question.

I get that question a lot from people that have been stuck for a while. Not physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

I have found that many of us have gotten stuck. And the ones who I believed were stuck were free.

I have a friend who resides in the halls of heaven. His name was Harry. Harry was confined to a wheelchair. He was full of life and a raucous human being. And Harry loved Jesus.

One day I was visiting him at the hospital on Christmas day, and I got up the courage to ask him what his being confined to a wheelchair had revealed to him about God. His answer stunned me. He looked at me and laughed...God is good. Harry wasn't stuck.

Why do so many of us get stuck? Why are we so susceptible to weariness and evasiveness. Why does our life in the Spirit so often look like we are stuck in the mud, rather than running free?

Is there a way for us to get “unstuck”?

Turn with me to the book of Luke. Luke 24:13-35

After Jesus arose from the grave and defeated death, there are eleven accounts of Him being seen alive.

Of them all...this one is the one I love the most...in this account, you can see the Lord of Life seek out the ones He loves and get them unstuck.

(Read vs. 13)

As Luke tells us this account, this story, I want you to know that on the day that He arose from the grave, Jesus joined two of His disciples, one whose name is Cleopas.

They are walking back to the village of Emmaus. It's probably where they were from.

They are on the road that will take them home...the road to Emmaus.

This is a familiar road to them. They have travelled this road before. They know where the 7-eleven is. They know where to turn off to go home. They know this road. The road that takes them from Emmaus to Jerusalem...and from Jerusalem back home. Today the road is different. You see we can travel familiar roads...with different hearts. Let me show you.

The road you take to work every day is same old same old. But it's different if you have to take it to the hospital...and there is an emergency. The road changes because of the happenings of your life.

The road for these two disciples has changed. They are going back home on the same road but different.

The road to Emmaus that they are travelling on now, is the road you take after you've been to Golgotha.

It's the road we take when the other roads we've taken turn out to be dead ends. It's the road out of town.

I want you to know that they have left Jerusalem because there is nothing there for them anymore. Nothing but memories of a might-have-been Messiah...and memories of what the world did to Him.

Hope is in scarce supply.

As they are consoling each other, a stranger comes, inviting himself not only into their company but also into their conversation. Gently, this stranger begins to probe their pain.

(Read vs. 14-19a)

He asks what they are discussing. In their gloom they tell Him about "Jesus of Nazareth", a prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." They speak of the hope they had poured into this man, their Rabbi, Jesus. They exposed their wounded hearts and lament about how the religious rulers handed Him over to be crucified, and about the rumors of His resurrection.

Jesus listens and then He speaks some strange words:

"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?"

Jesus goes on to explain from the Scriptures how Christ's death was a fulfillment of prophecy. The fire of hope flows from His heart as He speaks into their pain.

Book by book, beginning with Genesis, Jesus rekindles the fire in their lives that pain and suffering have all but extinguished. Step by step, that smoldering candle begins to flicker.

Verse by verse, the sparks of the gospel have begun to glow.

Notice also that it is the same road that they are travelling. The one thing that has changed is who they are travelling with.

(Read vv. 28-32)

By the time they reach Emmaus, their hearts are passionately ignited by hope.

On the outskirts of town, they find the sun setting, and as they stop for the night, Jesus continues on.

Eager to hear more they beg Jesus not to go farther and eat and rest with them.

He does and as Jesus breaks the bread, gives thanks, and gives it to them, **“their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”**

And as soon as they recognize Him, He vanishes.

Not waiting for the sunrise, they immediately returned to Jerusalem...to proclaim a risen Savior...notice that they are on the same road...but now they are going in a different direction!

(Read vv. 33-35)

It is here that I want to point out to you a strange yet common affliction.

It is an affliction that causes us to become stuck.

The heart condition of these disciples is twofold: slow and burning.

Often we are a people of slow and burning hearts. Sorrow and hope, awe and self-pity, wonder and worry, belief and doubt all mixed loosely in us...tugging us one way or the other. As we travel on that same road we are so caught up in the events that we fail to see that Jesus walks the road with us. If you are like me, often's the time that I can look straight at Him and not recognize Him.

As we are walking, Jesus opens the Scriptures to us, truth is spoken, and something happens within...a warming at times, a scorching flame at others.

It is in those moments that the scales fall from our eyes, and we see that it is the Lord who is walking with us. It is those moments that we find Him amid our Praise and worship...even amid our hopelessness and sorrow, we see Him.

I want you to know that our encounters with the risen Christ are mostly like that: glimpses, wonderful moments with the Living God...that make us ask the question to each other: **“didn't our hearts burn within us? Didn't they?”**

It is the burning heart that keeps us going on the journey. It is the slowness of heart makes the journey wearisome. A burning heart inspires us to run toward God. A slow heart discourages us and makes the journey a drudgery. Sometimes the slow heart tempts us to run, but to run away.

Slowness of heart and the heart that burns within are both inbred within us. It doesn't take much for us to choose one or the other. But we need to become wise in our reasoning.

I have a book that was published in 1961 by J.B. Phillips. It is titled “Your God is Too small”. It is a thin little book. It is a prophetic call for believers to give up our modern idols and the foolish myths we have developed about God. He says that we have made God “man-sized”. Smaller. In our hands God has become our image bearer, rather than we His.

He then issues a call to return to the true God of mystery and sovereignty and intimacy...God reveled in Jesus Christ.

Last year I was at one of those community breakfast's sitting at a table with people I did not know. We wore those name tags and ate breakfast sharing small talk. When the subject came up as to what we all did for a living, the table was surprised to find out that I was an associate pastor. After a moment of silence one of the ladies spoke out and said

"that's so nice. I've always felt that churches serve a role in society. They are safe. People should be able to have a place to go to escape reality for a little while."

After snarling for a moment, I told her as nice as possible that "church" is not safe. We meet before a living God. A God who destroys our old self and raises up a new creature." We follow the Holy Wild.

I want to say it again. The safe god asks nothing of us and gives nothing to us as well. The safe god never drives us to our knees in hungry desperate prayer. The safe god never sets our feet to scale the high places in search for the reality of God's kingdom with fierce passion. The safe god would never ask us to shout from the rooftops or dance in our underwear. The safe god doesn't make us a kingdom or priests and warriors but makes us docile sheep. Sheep without a shepherd.

A safe god never inspires awe, or worship or sacrifice. The safe god calls and beckons to us to stay in the shadowlands. To live like the people of the shadowlands...the safe god wants us to stay in the shadowlands.

The church, of which you and I are a part of, we have a strange habit. We are a people of extremes, and we rarely find the middle. When we look at God's wrath and sovereignty, we can easily peg God as a tyrant and a bully. And with God's kindness and tender mercy we just as easily translate that as niceness. We liken him as some senile uncle pattering around in his yard.

But when the true God of the Scriptures shows us we rarely recognize Him.

The apostle John wrote this: **John 1:10-11 (Read)**

One translation puts Jn. 1:11 this way:

"His own do not receive him" because they "do not recognize him.

One of the main ways that Satan has blinded the world is through the belief in the safe god. The safe god kills the power of recognition within us. The safe god has no power to console us in our grief or shake us from complacency. Nor does he have any power to save us from the pit.

But God isn't safe. He isn't nice. God is a consuming fire. His main concern is not doting or pampering us. God's main business is making you and me holy. Kadosh. Whole. A gathering of priests. The beloved.

And for those of us who love the shadowlands more than the burnt patch of holy ground, whose hearts are more slow than burning, only the Living God can move us from this place of complacency. That requires both the kindness (hesed) and the fierceness of our God who is jealous for us!

In Exodus 20:20 Moses captures the paradox of an unsafe but good God. After the people of Israel witness God's awesome power, they beg Moses not to let God speak to them, Moses responds this way:

"do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

A.W. Tozer commented on this account saying:

We take refuge from God in God. Only a God we fear and yet do not need to be afraid of can make our slow hearts burn. Only this God can dislodge us from the shadowlands.

Read pp 120 "Your God is too Safe" Buchanan

Selah.