

TALISMAN, ICONS AND THE BURNING

The Luke passage is the well known "Walk to Emmaus".  
It is about not knowingly having a journey with the resurrected Jesus.  
The two in the story were dispersing from the tragic scene in Jerusalem, and along their way to the nearby town, Jesus joined them as they walked along. They didn't know it was Jesus until later.  
It was still Sunday, what we call Easter Sunday.

We know the name of one of them--Cleopas, we know nothing of the other person,..... and we shouldn't assume it was a man.  
It could have been his wife.

There is no mention of why Jesus was out for a stroll. We are left to wonder about this.  
Maybe, Jesus likes to join sad and troubled people on their journey?

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The two were close to the disciples. They knew current "inside" information, and they were very sad and disappointed by what had unfolded.  
In their eyes, Jesus was killed, and then his tomb was found empty that morning. The two dismissed the rumours that Jesus was alive.  
They had hoped he was The Messiah, and that he would turn their world around. But, it seemed like all that hope was for naught.

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While chatting with them, Jesus learns of their assumptions and scolds them for their limited thinking. Jesus went on, citing scripture passages that pointed to Jesus, about what God's redemption means, and so forth.  
Yet, they still didn't get it.  
They still didn't realize that Jesus was present with them.

The redemptive face of God was there. The Divine was present with them, yet..... they couldn't make the leap / they couldn't transcend their own assumptions and fears.  
\*BUT, they could feel the tension. They could sense the pull of God, and it felt like a burning in their soul.  
Their SOUL was on fire. Their heart was on fire.

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There was a time when we call that burning condition,..."Being Under conviction", but we rarely use that term anymore.

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In the Acts text, Peter's preaching about Jesus "convicted" the listeners. It says that they were "cut to the heart". This is another way of describing the burning in the soul.

Being under conviction is the state of "feeling" that something huge is a mess inside us.

We feel that deep-in-the-soul Burning sensation when we are Not connected to God and when God is trying to connect with us.

It's like hearing the phone ring, but unable to answer it.

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The burning happens when we are not plugged into God.

We may experience it during a personal struggle, such as when we are wrestling with temptation.....or... when a close relationship is in turmoil. A broken relationship means Love is so close by, yet missed / not being engaged, which is just like not connecting with God.

Torment could define the burning, too.

There are occasions when WE search for God and God is reaching to us,..... but we're not sensing God's presence--not connecting.

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Cleopas and his partner were with Jesus, but NOT With Jesus.

It was as if a wall / a closed door was between them.

Then,.....suddenly, when Jesus "broke" the bread, their eyes were opened. The act of Jesus doing what he did at the Last Supper opened the door. The two then discovered Jesus was with them.

This is significant. The symbolic, the tangible act is significant.

In Acts, those under conviction, asked Peter what they should do for relief. Peter told them to change their ways / to repent,....AND to go through the symbolic ritual of Baptism--to feel the water.

Obviously, there is something important about these two actions of communion and baptism.

These "physical" objects / actions with objects are powerful.

Apparently, they can open us to see God / to connect with God.

Was the water or the bread a magical amulet ...or... a talisman ...or...an icon... or what?

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In our modern age of science and skepticism, most people dismiss such things as superstition, but should we?

Admit it or not, there are lots of objects and things that have influential power--objects that alter our way of thinking and being.

A TV can makes us sit for hours on end, as it transports our thoughts and emotions to distant places.

Beer companies advertize to young men trying to make their brand a symbol for parties and women.

There are countless examples of things/ objects that have power, including music.

When we hear an old song, we can be instantly taken back into time, with all the visions and emotions.

A photo... or a toddler's hat can do that, too,... as can the smell of one's hockey equipment. <

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So, some definitions may be helpful at this point.

An amulet is an object that contains magical or sacramental properties.

It has innate power, such as those wristbands that are advertized claiming to give a person added vitality. I was told this rock has magical power. [ show rock]. Just Hematite.

I don't give amulets much credence. I'm very skeptical about them.

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A Talisman is similar, but it's power / magic must be charged--consecrated. It is an object that is given "power".

A Rosary blessed by the Pope would be a talisman.

For some Christians, the bread and wine are a talismans. They believe the elements have holy power poured into them that can transform us.

Also in this category are Religious Icons.

The Orthodox churches openly use Religious Icons as portals to God/ focal points that help us connect with God.

Usually, they are painted art works bearing the likeness of a divine object or person. They are Not an idol, but merely a powerful image.

Throughout Christian history, there has been a great deal of controversy and resistance to the use of religious icons.

However, the Christian communities that arose from Constantinople continue to use icons.

I have some examples in my office {show one}.

I find them to be beautiful; however, they don't do anything for me. They don't inspire me to sense God's closeness.

Here's another example, a simpler one [show pocket cross].

I was given this, and told that if I carried it with me, it would make me feel God's presence.

Truth be told, I only felt like I had more change in my pocket than I did. Maybe it worked for the person who gave it to me. ???

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These examples are religious symbols, and churches are full of religious symbols--designed to help believers to better connect with God.

Stain glass windows, religious sculptures and grand cathedrals are icons in their own right.

They are intended to help all to sense God's presence.

Apparently, we Mennonites are not visual people. We tend to eschew such visual icons. We are not attracted to visual symbolism, yet we have our own type of icons that serve to make us feel in the presence of holiness. Strictly speaking, they are not icons; they are more like sacred cows.

Music from a hymn book / music with four part harmony is a Mennonite icon. When we sing together, God seems to draw nearer.

Potlucks may not make us feel closer to God, but food is a catalyst that draws us closer together.

For some Mennonites, Low German is like an icon.

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There are numerous articles, icons and symbols that have power / that affect us,.... and if one or two are absent, then we sense that something significant is missing.

Some are religious in nature and some are not.

And, that is why it is important that we are aware of them / that we use them appropriately.

This is also the reason, I'm taking the time to talk about them.

Certain things do have power to alter our thinking and emotions, and they can influence our choices and take us places.

Any addict will testify to the power of seeing a certain object, an object with the power to trigger a reaction.

We need to be able recognize such Talismans and icons in order to know which to avoid and which are beneficial, and ...when we need to know what is actually just a superstition.

A certain gold necklace or a faded T-shirt will not make a team win, no matter how much a person thinks it will.

A lucky charm is a superstition,.....and sometimes.... religious symbols are too,.....especially when they are abused.

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An object, action or a ritual is not mere superstition,...if it routinely works--if he has the power to affect us / to move us to a different place of being.

Moreover, God has chosen to give us such portals / such prompts for a purpose,...which is to open the door to better connect with God.

In ancient times, the arc of the covenant and the temple served that purpose.

From the New Testament, we are given baptismal water and the communion elements.

They are like Talismans for the community of believers.

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No doubt, some powerful symbols are personal, such as an old knickknack from our grandmother,....or a particular Bible verse.

I think God will give us, individually, something or things that act as a talisman.

For me, Wind Chimes cause me to realize that God is present, and there are certain Bible verses that do the same for me.

You may have your own, and it should not be assumed that what works for you will work for others.

That is why I'm not fond of throwing out Bible verses without clarification and explanation.

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Moreover, the two on the road to Emmaus heard Bible verses with explanations, as did Peter's audience, and the effect was beneficial in that it deeply touched their soul. The inspiring messages made their hearts hungry and on fire.

Yet, they struggled to make the connection to the divine.  
The two didn't know Jesus.

Sometimes, something more is needed.  
Sometimes we need a portal, an icon / a talisman to open the door.

Jesus gave us the symbols of the bread and cup for that very purpose. In addition, communion is a community event.

There are times when the burning of the soul can only be resolved in a community of believers.  
We do communion together, for each other,.... and for ourselves.

In the wisdom of God, that is way beyond me, I do not understand why God, through Christ, has chosen to prey open the door.....in such a way.  
But God has,.....and that is why we do communion together.

Jesus broke the bread [ break bread ] ..... [silence and take to the table]

Jesus then took the cup [pour into cup]..... [silence and take to the table].  
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Today, we've heard the scriptures with explanation, and the breaking of bread was a surprise for the two walking with Jesus.

Today, communion is a surprise.....for all of us walking with Jesus.

Please do not feel obligated, but as we are singing our closing hymn, you are welcome to come to the front.....break a piece of bread and dip it in the cup.

You are invited to be surprised by communion.

Who knows, this may be a holy moment when God opens the door.