

*Open the Eyes of My (Burning) Heart*  
*The Rev. Christi O. Brown*  
*FPC Morningsong Service*  
*April 30, 2017*

**Luke 24:13-35**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

<sup>19</sup>He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

<sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?”

<sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

*The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.*

#### Prayer for Illumination

God of Wisdom and Grace, open our eyes and ears and hearts to you, O Lord, that we might hear your Word for us today. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Sermon

Fire is one of the most primal and essential elements for survival on earth. Fire gives you light to see in the darkness and warmth in the cold. It can be used as a signal of distress and to ward off ravenous animals. It gives you the ability to purify water. If you were lost or stranded, fire is one of the most critical resources you could have. Essentially, fire could save your life.

Fire is just as critical to our souls as well. When our hearts feel like they are reduced to ashes, a little fanning of the flames reignites a wholesome spiritual life. The disciples in our passage for today, who were immersed in deep sadness, were astonished at how their hearts burned in the presence of the stranger on the road, whom we know turned out to be Jesus.

When the risen Lord came upon them on the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his friend were grieving the recent death of their savior. Their hearts felt anything but alive. They felt heavy, like fire hoses had been turned upon them until they were drowning in water. Their flames had been reduced to almost nothing. So much so that when Jesus began walking along with them, they did not even recognize him. When Jesus asked them what they were discussing, that question stopped them in their tracks. They came to a standstill and looked painstakingly at the ground. I imagine it took Cleopas a moment to gather his composure and respond to this stranger, likely rather incredulously, “Do you not know of the things that have happened in Jerusalem these last several days?”

What fascinates me is that Cleopas continued to relay the details of how the women and other disciples had found the empty tomb that morning, and that the

band of angels had told the women that Christ was alive. But these men obviously didn't believe what the women had told them because they were still downtrodden and sullen. At this point Jesus, who I imagine might be taking up for the women a little bit, calls these two disciples—in a most lovingly way I'm sure—foolish and slow of heart.

Let's pause a moment here. This is the only time in all of his time on earth that Jesus calls anyone foolish. So we can imagine he was extremely frustrated with them. He's probably thinking, "You spent all this time with me and I prepared you for what was to come, but now you don't believe these things to be true. Really guys, come on!" But being the compassionate teacher that he is, Jesus decides to retell them their faith story, starting all the way back with Moses and the prophets.

They walked a long time on this 7-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. If you walked this same distance today, averaging 20 minutes a mile, it would take approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes. And that's with all the modern day high-tech gear. We can imagine it took these three men much longer in sandals on the dusty roads of the hill country. Though still appearing as a stranger to these two disciples, Jesus took advantage of that time to open the Scriptures to them.

Rapport was obviously re-established in that long walk, because when they approached their destination, the disciples graciously offered this stranger hospitality, inviting him to stay with them. And it was at the table, as they broke bread together, that things flip-flopped, and Jesus became the host. In the same way we commemorate when we celebrate communion, and just as Jesus had done for them several days before at the Last Supper, he took the bread, blessed it, broke

it and gave it to them. And it was then that something remarkable happened. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And then just as remarkably, in the same sentence in fact, Luke tells us that Jesus completely disappeared from their sight. Astonished, they looked at each other and proclaimed, “Were not our hearts burning as he talked with us and opened the Scriptures to us?!”

There is so much we can learn from this passage. First of all, the presence of Jesus is around us, even when we don’t recognize him. But when we pay attention, and catch even a glimpse, it’s enough for us to believe. These disciples were so excited by what they had experienced that even though the day was almost over, they hopped right back on the road and walked another 7 miles back to Jerusalem to proclaim the good news that we now proclaim every Easter, that Christ is risen indeed!

Secondly, their hearts burned as they walked and talked with Jesus and heard the Scriptures anew. It’s the same in our spiritual lives today. If we feel like our spirit has been squelched, if we are sullen and downtrodden (and all of us feel this way at some point), then one of the best things we can do is to go back to the basics of faith. We turn to Scripture to rediscover the good news. We spend time walking with and talking to Jesus in prayer. We discuss the Bible with other disciples. It reminds me of a saying I once heard about married couples: those who walk together stay together. This is likely true because you rarely walk in silence with someone else. Healthy, open and honest communication is the number one indicator of relationships that last. It is no different in our relationship with Christ. As we walk this journey with Christ, we have the opportunity to have dialogue

prayer with him as well. As we walk and talk, our relationship with Christ continues to develop and deepen.

Finally, it was in the act of hospitality and communion that their eyes were opened and they recognized Christ. The disciples extended an invitation of hospitality to the Lord by inviting him into their home and hearts. We need to do the same in our lives. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is always available, but we have to be open to receiving that grace. We have to invite Christ into our hearts and homes. Once seated at the disciples' table, as they broke bread together, the Lord opened their eyes to a whole new world. He ignited a flame in their hearts, and gave them a renewed spirit. He does the same for us every time we eat the bread and drink the cup as we remember our dying and rising in Christ.

There is a Sunday School class that was established here about six years ago that finds special meaning in this passage as well. The purpose of this class was to bring back adults who had become disengaged with Sunday School for various reasons. In some cases their secular life had taken over, or they had become burnt out, or they couldn't find their way at church once their children had left the house. For a lot of them, their spiritual fire needed re-stoking. And so a group of faithful leaders began a Sunday School class called Emmaus, named so because the purpose of this class would be to learn together so that their eyes would be opened to see the true Christ. And indeed, it has become a place of renewal, where faith is reignited.

If you stop by their class on any given Sunday, it is quickly apparent that their hearts are now burning. They have wonderful fellowship, great Bible lessons and

they often volunteer together to serve within the church and community. They are living into their Emmaus name. Their eyes have been opened, their hearts are burning, and just like the disciples did, they are sharing their renewed passion with others.

It turns out the original Greek word used for “open” in this passage takes on multiple meanings. It means to open thoroughly what had been closed. It means to open one’s eyes and ears. It means to open the mind in order to understand. And it means to open one’s soul, inspiring the desire to learn. All of these kinds of opening-up can happen inside you and me. It’s not limited to the two disciples on the road or the members of the Emmaus class. It’s available to anyone whose heart burns and yearns for more.

This desire to be open and see things in the way Christ desires us to reminds me of the popular Christian song (which we’ll sing in a minute) called “Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord.” The songwriter Paul Baloche says his heart was stirred to write this song by the Ephesians verse that says “I pray that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened.” (1:18)

And although Paul has written over 120 worship songs, this one has evoked the most reverberations from around the world. He says that it’s great to hear people resonate with that same desire to say, “I’ve been in religion a long time and that’s not enough. I want to know [Christ]. I want to see God. I want to wake up each day

and be more aware of Your presence in my life. I want to see Your kingdom in the midst of this world, so I can be a part of it and I can do my part.”<sup>1</sup>

Friends, I hope that’s true for all of us. I hope that as we go into this week we will take the time to walk with and talk to Jesus. That we will invite him into our hearts and homes. That our eyes will be opened that that our hearts will burn, so much so that even when we’re tired and worn out, that we’ll be energized enough to walk long distances in life to proclaim that everlasting Easter message to others, “Christ is risen, indeed!”

*All glory and honor be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.leadworship.com/pauls-blog/story-behind-open-the-eyes-of-my-heart/>