### “Our Hearts Burning” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Easter, Apr. 16, 2023

**Luke 24:13–35**

13Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18Then 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?” 19He 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, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But 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. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and 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. 24Some 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.” 25Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening . . .” So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They 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?” 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he’d been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Often we are reminded that Jesus came to reveal the Father more fully to all the children of God. He welcomed all who would listen, many of whom society had pushed aside—the poor, the lame, women, and children. God’s word is for all, including the humble and the ordinary. Most of us are very grateful for Jesus’ kindness toward ordinary people, since most of us are more or less ordinary, in lots of ways. Here he meets what seem to be two ordinary believers, only one of whom is named for us. So we can put ourselves in their shoes as they have this experience with the incognito Jesus.

The story is given a prominent place in Luke’s gospel. Right after the Resurrection, and the women’s encounter with an angel at the empty tomb, the very next story is this one, running for 23 verses. His appearance to his apostles, which comes next, only runs for 14 verses. Then comes the Ascension, four verses. So this charming story of two not-very-prominent disciples takes a major spot in Luke’s narrative.

Except for his sudden appearance and disappearance, there is nothing miraculous in this story. The most notable elements seem to be Jesus’ incognito status, his lecture about Messianic passages in the Scriptures and how it burned within the two friends, and the moment of recognition when he breaks the bread for them.

People have often wondered what were the Scriptures that he opened up for them. Were they the high hopes of the prophets, such as Isaiah’s hope for a spirit-endowed advocate for the “meek of the earth” (Isa 11:2, 4)? Or the idea expressed later in that book of a spirit-endowed one who proclaims “the year of the Lord’s favor . . . the oil of gladness instead of mourning” (Isa 61:2–3)?

Or was he referencing the suffering of a just person as in Psalm 22 where “I am poured out like water” and “they divide my clothes among themselves” (Ps 22:14, 18), or in Isaiah 53 where a person “was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth” and where “he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:7, 12)?

We do not know what Scriptures Jesus cited, but we *do* know that during his earth career he repeatedly cited passages from the prophets that spoke of “justice and mercy and faith” (Matt 23:23; see Mic 6:8), or of God desiring “mercy, not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13; 12:7; see Hos 6:6), or promising “they shall all be taught by God,” a line from Isaiah (John 6:45; see Isa 54:13).

Luke puts an emphasis on the prophetic foretelling of the Messiah’s suffering (Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28). However, Jesus’ own emphasis, during his ministry, was on spiritual principles and truths, rather than on the details about his coming arrest and death. We do know that some of the apostles’ writings put a lot of emphasis on Jesus’ death, and accepted some interpretations of that death that were starting to circulate, especially the interpretations of the Apostle Paul, but Jesus did not give voice to those interpretations, but emphasized justice, mercy, and faith.

So I am content to just say, in general, that Jesus referred to Messianic passages in the Old Testament, and that his remarks were moving to the two friends, such that they later said their hearts burned within them. I imagine the Scriptures really came alive when Jesus was interpreting them. Early in his ministry when he was reading Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue, he said “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Imagine being in the pews of that synagogue at that moment! Imagine your curiosity and amazement! Wouldn’t you have wanted to speak with Jesus after that service? Jesus was often fulfilling Scripture, throughout his ministry. He was fulfilling the deepest hopes and highest thinking of the prophets.

Further, there was something recognizable about Jesus’ way of blessing and breaking the bread. Probably these friends had been to some of Jesus’ public speeches and had seen Jesus break bread and pass it out. There was something in how Jesus did that that evoked their recognition, perhaps a fatherly and caring manner, maybe the way that he gave thanks.

Their hearts were already warmed with his teaching, and they were now thrilled to the core that they had been visited by the risen Jesus. And so, in “that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem” several hours away, seeking out the apostles to tell them what they had experienced. Undeterred by having just walked seven miles, they walked another seven to share their excitement.

For all of the people who met the risen Jesus, there was something memorable about the encounter, a remarkable interpretation of Scripture, or a memorable message to be transmitted to the apostles, or his words of comfort after some of the people were startled by his appearance. In Matthew, when the risen Jesus meets the women, he says to them “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matt 28:10). He always shows attentiveness to people’s reactions in the present moment, and he always directs them forward to the future. He directs them to go back to more familiar territory, and he will meet them there.

There is something about the return to the familiar. When the two believers recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread, their memories are returned to the times they saw Jesus do this. Jesus’ instructions to the women also have to do with the apostles returning to the familiar, to Galilee. There they will receive new instructions. But first they must remain in Jerusalem until they receive a new Spirit that will be poured out: “stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

The Spirit will become their new source of power. The risen Jesus is now getting ready to depart the earth, at which time he is handing over leadership to the Spirit. The apostles will be comforted by their encounters with their risen Master, and then they are entrusted to the new life, under the guidance of the Spirit.

There are a number of experiences and attitudes from these stories that we, too, need to internalize. We need to have experiences where our hearts burn within us as we study the Scriptures. We need to feel the friendly Jesus sitting with us, feel him as part of our lives. We need to live freely, unafraid of death.

Take Jesus with you into your daily living. Utter silent prayer in your minds throughout the day. Talk to him as you would talk to your best friend or to a parent. The feeling of his presence will grow. More and more often you will have the experience of being able to say “didn’t our hearts burn within us?” Think of him when you sit down and when you rise up. He is the Light of the World (John 8:12). Let him light your daily walk, and let your light shine.