

Sermon for Sunday, April 29, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"MEN WITH BURNING HEARTS"

St. Luke 24:13-32

Text: "While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them." St. Luke 24:15

Several months ago I preached a sermon on this same scripture. While I am experienced enough as a preacher to know that few if any will remember the sermon, I entitled it, "The Unrecognized Companion." In that sermon I raised the question as to why the disciples didn't recognize Jesus when he joined them on their walk to Emmaus. And when you stop to think about it, that isn't a bad question. Here were two men that early Christian tradition says were a part of the 70 that Jesus once sent out during his ministry. That means they were men who were close to him--close enough that they knew his teachings and close enough that he had confidence to send them out briefly on their own. Yet, after the crucifixion, for some strange reason they do not recognize him. In that sermon I raised the question as to why. I suggested that first, they didn't recognize him because they were not expecting him. For all practical purposes, in their minds Jesus was dead--hope had ended at Calvary. But secondly I noted that perhaps they did not recognize him because they did not know him very well after all. Christ comes to us in many forms--in the face of a little child, in the cup of a beggar, in the eyes of a prisoner, in the fevered brow of an ill person. To truly know Christ, we have to learn to see him in the faces of others--people whom he loves and for whom he died. I suggested thirdly, that perhaps the disciples didn't want to recognize him. After many long months, they were on their way here. Jesus meant duty and responsibility. He had spoken of not having a place to lay his head. And they were tired of duty and responsibility. The truth is, perhaps they didn't want to see him because it meant more responsibility. Finally, I suggested that they didn't recognize Jesus because the experience of the cross and of the resurrection had led him to deeper levels of a spiritual maturity and they had not grown. Our concepts of Jesus are often Sunday schoolish and child-like when we ought to be moving to deeper spiritual levels.

Now, even though you may not have heard that sermon or if you have forgotten it, it really wasn't such a bad sermon! Nevertheless, after Easter I got to reading the gospel accounts of what happened after Easter and I came again to this strange story of two followers of Jesus who walked about seven miles with him and yet did not know him. But this time I had a new question in my heart about those two men. I wasn't so interested in why they didn't recognize Jesus. Instead, I got to wondering what did it mean to them when they did realize finally who he was? After all, once they knew who he was the Bible says, "They rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem." And I thought to myself, "Well, after a tiring journey, that was no small thing." And when they did that, I begin to realize that the appearance of Jesus to them had made a profound impact, a dramatic change, in their lives. So, I want to share with you this morning some thoughts on what it meant to them that Jesus appeared in their lives.

The first thought I would like to share with you is this: Love is alive! Those who love Jesus are important to him. Now, there were certain disciples who were significant. There was Peter and John--they were two of the first disciples. Peter was the spokesman for the other disciples and John was so beloved that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to John when he was dying on the cross. Now, we are not surprised that Jesus appeared to them. They were leaders. Or again, St. Paul turns out to be the most significant Christian in the history of the missionary enterprise of the church. It is not surprising that Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road. Paul was a top leader--a sort of chief executive--and we would expect the Lord to appear to him. But who are those two men? They are so insig-

nificant that the name of one is only mentioned incidentally and the other remains unnamed to this day. Yet, Jesus thought they were important, no matter how insignificant they might have been. The real leaders of the followers of Jesus were hiding out in Jerusalem because they were afraid the Jewish leaders would try to put them to death, too. But these two men are so unimportant to the authorities that they are not running and hiding in fear. They are not important enough that they are in danger of their lives. No, these two men--one forever unnamed--are sadly going home. In the great drama that has unfolded in Jerusalem, they are insignificant players of no consequence. Yet, in a breathtaking moment, we suddenly realize that they are important to Jesus. Love is alive! He loves them enough that he comes to them and makes himself known to them. It is true that they don't recognize him, but patiently he stays with them until the truth begins to dawn and the reality of his presence is confirmed.

I don't know how you respond to that, but that is awfully exciting to me! People who love Jesus are important to him! They may not be important to the world--so much so that the world doesn't even know a person's name--but because they love Jesus, they are important to him. That makes me so excited that I want to shout to people, "Jesus loves you! You are important to him!" And that is what the good news is--Jesus loves us. Whoever you are this morning, if you love Jesus, you are important to him. He knows your name even if the world doesn't. He knows who you are even if the public never heard of you. Over in Philippians (4:3) St. Paul mentions some of those who labored by his side in the gospel and then he speaks of unnamed people--he speaks of "the rest of my fellow workers". But that isn't all. He doesn't record their names and history doesn't record their names, but these fellow workers are important to Jesus. Because they love him, their names are written in the book of life. Therefore, St. Paul writes, "The rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

You know, the gospels leave unsaid so much of what must have happened. For example, the gospels don't tell us much of what happened after the resurrection. But here and there we get some clues. One of those clues is found in the 15th chapter of I Corinthians where Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to over 500 disciples. Had you ever stopped to realize how many people saw Jesus? And why? Because love was alive! Because whoever those unnamed disciples were, because they loved Jesus, they were important to him.

I want to say to you this morning, you may be feeling unimportant and insignificant; you may have done some things that you are ashamed of and sorry for and you may have a very low opinion of yourself. Yet, if in your heart you truly love Jesus, you are important to him. He knows your name--it is written in the book of life!

The second thought I would like to share with you is this: The word is alive! On the road to Emmaus, Jesus reminded them of how important Scripture was. Do you remember the story? He said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!....And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Later on, when they had recognized Jesus, they remembered what he had told them from the Word. They said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" Yes, the Bible set their hearts on fire. The Word of God made their hearts beat with excitement. The scriptures made their breasts burn from within.

Do you know what is wrong with the church and with many Christians today? Their fire has gone out! There are cold ashes on the hearth. And do you know why? It is because the church and many Christians have gotten away from the Word. Many of our more liberal leaders in the church have taught us that the Bible doesn't mean what it says, that it is myth, that it is not reliable history, that the

literal Word is not to be trusted. Many today is an effort to appear sophisticated and knowledgeable in a technological and scientific age have repudiated the Word to make it palatable to 20th century man. But all technological, scientific, 20th century man ever really wanted down in his heart was something to believe in and someone to love him. And that's what the Word had to say. Is it any wonder that the church is in decline and men are turning to sorcery and witchcraft and the occult?

That is what happens when you get away from the Word. Do you want your heart to burn within you? Then get into the Word. Do you want your life on fire for Jesus? Then dig into the Scriptures. This world isn't going to be changed by anything but the pure Word of God. People are not going to have their hearts transformed and their lives changed by anything but the Holy Scriptures. And neither of us is going to be much of a Christian if we don't know Scripture. There was a time in my life when I made fun of what we called "Bible totin', Bible thumpin'" fundamentalists. But there came a time in my life when my heart was dead and cold and the only thing that could make it burn again was to get into the Word of God.

It may be this morning that you are a luke-warm Christian, that your fire is going out, that cold ashes on the hearth is about all that's left. Get into the Bible. Get into Holy Scripture. I promise you that what happened to the two men in our Scripture will happen to you--your heart will begin to burn within you.

But let me hasten on--I'm fast running out of time! The third thought I would like to share with you is this: Jesus is alive! Jesus wanted those who loved him to know that he was alive! He wanted them to know that he came to meet them in the commonplace, the ordinary walks of life. Jesus didn't meet them in the temple. He didn't come to them on some emotional mountain top. He didn't come to them in some solitary moment of holy prayer. No, he met them in the common, ordinary walks of life. What could be more ordinary than walking to the next town--nothing spiritual or exciting about that. Yet, it was there that the living Christ came to meet them. People get the idea that the only place you can find Jesus is on a retreat or in church or on some spiritual mountain top. You are much more likely to find Jesus in your kitchen or in your office or your classroom. Jesus is alive--right in the middle of life--and that is where he comes to meet us.

R. W. Dale, a minister of a hundred years ago, was once sitting in his study trying to prepare his Easter sermon. He was in a black mood. Holy week with its rigorous schedule had drained him and he could hardly think (I can appreciate that! Today marks the 21st service I have conducted since Palm Sunday!) Then, unaccountably, the thought struck him, "Why, Jesus is alive, as alive as I am and in this very room with me! Jesus Christ is alive!" And that, he knew was what he had to tell the congregation; not merely that they had a chance of surviving into an after-life, and not merely that the flowers bloom in the spring, but rather that the same Lord who had once swept mightily over the arid hills and wooded valleys of Palestine was, in a different sense, still alive.

Yes, love is alive and you are import to Jesus; the Word is alive and you know now what it is to have the burning heart; Jesus is alive and each of us can know him personally. Let me just add this--the living Jesus is certainly a gentleman. He will not force himself on you. He will not shove his foot in the door of your heart like a persistent salesman. No, he is a gentleman. The only way he will enter your heart is by personal invitation. You must invite him in.

Back during the Second World War, the heads of nations were discussing how they could pool their forces against the enemy. Someone reported that the Pope of Rome had offered certain suggestions. Instantly, Stalin, the communist leader, asked, "How many divisions does the Pope have?" Well, the Pope has no divisions. But

Jesus does--he has divisions who are soldiers of the cross--men who know that love is alive, that the Word is alive, that Jesus is alive--men who have invited him into their hearts and they have become alive for Jesus, men with burning hearts.

The men of the road to Emmaus met Jesus. As a result they went back to Jerusalem--back to the battlefront. They were alive for Jesus, they were men with burning hearts, soldiers of the cross. And like a mighty army the divisions of Jesus marched out of Jerusalem to try and win the world for Him. Are you alive for Jesus, a soldier of Christ? Are you a Christian with a burning heart?