

Sermon for Sunday, September 11, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
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"HEARTBURN OR BURNING HEART?"

St. Lukes 24:13-35

Text: They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked  
to us on the road while he opened to us the scriptures?" St. Lukes 24:32

Did you ever stop to think how often people get heartburn from their religion? For example, suppose you do something wrong. First, your conscience pricks you and then it begins to burn within you until it becomes almost an obsession. You try to ignore it or push it down into the subconsciousness, but it just won't go away. The next thing you know you begin to have physical symptoms including indigestion and heartburn. Dr. Mayo of Mayo Clinic fame once said that perhaps as much as 50% of hospital beds were filled by people who were suffering from problems that at base were moral problems.

Or, again, suppose you are at a party. There is lots of food and the drinks are flowing freely. Religion is always a topic at one point or another at such affairs and someone asks you, "What do you think of this Jesus business?" And there you stand with too many hors d'oeuvre and your third drink and suddenly you've got indigestion.

Or, imagine again, that you've just lost your temper and swore at your wife and shouted at the children and kicked at the dog and your little girl begins to cry and says, "well, at least Jesus loves us." And suddenly you've got heartburn.

Or, again, suppose your club decides to open its meeting with prayer and they call on you; or it is personal testimony time at the church meeting and you hear the preacher calling your name; or your plane is landing at the airport and just as you are coming in you hear the pilot gun the motors and you know something is wrong and suddenly you start to pray and you realize its the first time in a week and whc's going to listen to you now? Have those things happened to you and you wished you had some tums or rolaids in your pocket.

Two men were on their way to a little town called Emmaus which is just outside of Jerusalem. They had been followers of a man named Jesus. But there in Jerusalem the religious authorities had seen to it that he was put to death and now they were going home. Surely they had heartburn. They must have been terribly upset. All of their dreams had gone up in smoke and all of their hopes had been dashed.

As they are walking along going home, suddenly a stranger comes along and walks with them. The Bible tells us it is Jesus, but they do not recognize him. Have you ever wondered why they didn't know him? Several possibilities come to mind. Maybe they didn't recognize him because they were not expecting him. They had heard the rumor of his resurrection, but they really didn't believe it and they certainly didn't expect him on the road home. Do you think we have that trouble too? I suppose if Jesus suddenly appeared here in church this morning we might recognize him because if we ever did see him, it would be in church. Or would it? Maybe Jesus would meet us instead at the office--or the club--or the party--or in the middle of a family squabble. And we wouldn't expect that, would we? If you were to meet Jesus, where do you think it might be?

Or maybe they didn't recognize him because they didn't know him very well after all. There is the story about a certain valley where Jesus was reported to be coming one day. The rich man began to prepare for the visit because he knew Jesus would visit him first since he was the most important man in the whole valley. Since he was busy with his preparations, he impatiently turned away a beggar at the door, a sick man who sought shelter, and a little child who came asking for a drink of water. Down the road a poor, simple man was making ready in the hope that after

Jesus had visited everyone else perhaps he would visit him. But he never finished his preparations because of so many interruptions. A beggar came by who had to be fed; a sick old man came and he put him in his own bed; a thirsty child came by who needed a drink of cold water from the spring. But last of all there came to his door Jesus himself. The rich man, when he heard it, could hardly believe his ears. Hurrying there he addressed the Lord, "Yes," replied Jesus, "and three times today I have been to your home and you would not receive me."

Maybe that's our problem, too. We don't recognize him because we do not know him very well after all. He comes to us in the face of an old person who needs attention, in the face of a beggar, in the person of someone ill who needs our loving concern. Do you remember how Jesus put it? "I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you put clothes on me; I was ill and you came to my help; I was in prison and you visited me..." (Matt. 25:35,36)

Or again, maybe those men on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus because down deep they really didn't want to know him. After all those hard months of following him, without a place to lay their heads, they were not going home. They were tired of it. And as long as they didn't know who he was, they could go their way. Do you think that we might have that problem, too. I'm afraid sometimes we really don't want to know Jesus because if we admit he is the Son of God and that he died for the sins of the world, including mine and if I am involved in something I shouldn't be or doing something I ought not to do; to admit he is who and what the Bible says he is means than that I've got to change my life style or break some habit patterns, or assume some duty and responsibility, so I really don't want to know him after all.

Yet, I suppose those two men were suffering from a sort of spiritual heartburn as they went to Emmaus. But, you know, a funny thing happened when they got there. They recognized Jesus. And they said to each other, "did not our hearts burn within us?" What do you suppose made their hearts burn within them? Let me suggest several things.

First, our text for this morning says this: "did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road..." What are the key words there? Are they not surprised that Jesus appeared to Peter, for after all he was the leader of the disciples. It was not surprising that Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, for Paul was to lead the greatest missionary enterprise in the world. But who were these two men going to Emmaus? One of them is not even named. The disciples of Jesus are hiding out in Jerusalem for fear of the authorities, but these two are so insignificant that they are free to go home without fear. Yet, they are important to Jesus.

I don't know how you respond to that, but that touches my heart. Everybody is important to Jesus. They may not be important to the world--so much so that the world may not even know a person's name--but they are important to Jesus. There are a lot of people today who feel unimportant, unloved, uncared for. But our hearts burn within us when we know that Jesus loves us everyone. Carl Barth was perhaps the greatest theologian of this century and one day someone asked this great intellectual giant, "what is the most significant thought you have ever had?" Without hesitation, Barth replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know."

Yes, "he talked to us..." And when they knew that Jesus cared about them, that they were important to him, they raced back to Jerusalem to share that good news with the whole world.

The second thing our text for today says is this: "did not our hearts burn within us... while he opened to us the scriptures?" And what are the important words here? Are they not the words, "he opened to us..." That is, the Bible spoke to their lives, to their needs. 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 so many of us have gotten away from the word of God. There are those today who are ashamed of the word. They think that in order to appeal to modern, 20th century man we must dilute and water down what the Bible says. But deep down in his heart the thing modern man wants most desperately of all is something he can believe in; he wants some authority for his life.

Several weeks ago Sydney and I spent a week at the University of Indiana. People were there from all over America, so many that registration had to be closed and many could not attend. They paid money to travel there, they had to pay for their room and board for the week, and then they had to pay to attend the lectures. And do you know what those lectures were about? They were lectures on what rules the Bible has for our daily living. Why were these people coming from so far and spending so much and sitting for ten hours a day in a lecture? Because they wanted some authentic word for their lives. They wanted to know what God had to say to them about how they should live.

Yes, those two men from Emmaus had hearts on fire because Jesus loved them, they were important to him; and their hearts were aflame because God's word spoke to their lives.

Let me share something with you. Starting on the first Sunday in October (which is World Wide Communion Sunday) we are going to have a 12 month crusade here at Central Presbyterian Church. Because we are getting a burden on our hearts for reaching out and ministering to this great metropolitan area, because there are so many people here who do not know Jesus and who need to know him. And the first goal of this crusade, which is going to have three goals, will be this; for you and me to grow in our commitment to Jesus Christ. This will involve our getting deeper into the word of God. God has something to say to us. God has a message for our lives. God has a word of authority for the way we live. In some way, all of us need to commit ourselves to setting our hearts on fire with the word of Jesus, with the word of God. The second goal will be to show our faith to the world. That is, we will try to live out our lives as Christians before the world that the world can see what it means to belong to Jesus. You know the earliest Christian community lived in a pagan environment and those Christians tried to live out, to show their Christian commitment and their love of Jesus and the way they lived. And do you know what judgment the pagan world made on those Christians? They said, "see how they love one another." And you and I have got to find new ways to live out our Christian commitment so that the world may know that Jesus is the Lord of our lives. Our third goal will be to go--to go into the world in which we live and share with our friends, our neighbors, what it is that makes our hearts burn for Jesus.

In the story we read for our scripture this morning, after two men from Emmaus recognized Jesus, after their hearts were burning within them, the Bible tells us this: "And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem." And then we come to these words, "Then they told what had happened." Isn't that always what happens when we discover that we are important to Jesus and that he loves us? Isn't this always what happens when we discover that God's word is relevant to our needs, to our lives? If our hearts are burning within us, we want to share with others the good news.



John Calvin is the father of the Reformed faith and of our church. He is known for his great intellectual ability and for his great theological writings. But on his personal crest that he designed himself, Calvin had a hand holding a burning heart with the motto that he always wanted his heart on fire for Jesus offered to God. We are going to call our 12 month crusade the "BURNING HEART CRUSADE" after John Calvin. One of the things you can do to begin your personal participation for this crusade is to take the training we are offering to learn to share your faith. You see, if your heart is truly on fire for Jesus, you will want to do that.

But the question each of us needs to ask himself this morning is this: does Jesus give me heartburn or a burning heart? How is it with you? Whoever you are this morning, whatever your need, whatever your sin, I want you to know that you are important to Jesus--that he loves you. He wants you to come to him, to give him your heart.

Are you on some desolate, lonely Emmaus road? Jesus wants to come and share your journey with you. If you have been holding back in giving your heart to him, won't you do it this morning? You don't need to travel alone for Jesus wants to walk with you. If you have a sort of spiritual heartburn this morning, surrender your life to Jesus. You see, I don't know how you spell relief, but the Bible spells it J E S U S !

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