

Sermon for April 27, 2008 – Hearts Afire!

Luke 24: 13-35

On August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. set peoples' hearts afire with his speech, commonly called the "I have a dream" speech. In it he called to mind the promises of the Lord for peaceful, whole community. In it he called to mind the promises that this country was founded on. In it he set hearts afire as those who heard him speak caught a glimpse of a higher, more worthy way of life than we had been leading as a people and as a nation until that moment. Listen to a few brief excerpts, as Dr. King's words set our hearts on fire anew:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men are created equal.'**

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will they be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring—when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, **Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank **God** Almighty, we are free at last!"**

These words are so memorable because they help us to get a glimpse of a better way than they way we had been living. It offers us a future with hope.

A future with hope – that is what Moses had been offering glimpses of to the Hebrew people as they prepared to cross over into the Promised Land, in Deuteronomy. In Chapter 30, verses 15-20 he describes this future, and in verses 19 and 20 he reaches a crescendo: **I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying Him, and holding fast to Him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.** This is a glimpse of a better way: life, obedience, protection, length of days, a homeland. Moses surely inflamed the hearts of all who heard that sermon.

In today's reading we find two disciples, heart-sore, walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had hoped, these two disciples, along with the others, that Jesus was the Messiah, the warrior-king who was going to overthrow the hated Romans and establish a modern-day Jewish theocracy, a government founded on the rule of God. Those hopes had gone up in smoke three days before, when Jesus died on the cross. There is also confusion in their hearts, because of the report of the women who had run back from the empty tomb with the message of the resurrection. But when several of the male disciples had gone to see what the women were talking about, they only saw the empty tomb, which didn't mean too much to them. Their hearts surely weren't on fire at that point; at that point, their hearts resembled nothing more than cold, dead ashes. As they made their heartsick way to Emmaus, this stranger on the road started to take them through scripture, from Genesis to Zechariah and ending with Malachi as a way to help them understand what had been going on over the last few days. But it was only at the breaking of the bread that the disciples understood who was opening scripture, and their hearts. The disciples' hearts were set on fire when Jesus helped them to get a glimpse of a better way than the way they had been hoping for.

That is what our hearts, our hungry hearts, our parched hearts, our hearts straining to hear what the Lord will say, our heartsick hearts longing for new life, our hearts longing for home, are hoping for: a glimpse of a better way. When we catch a glimpse of that better way, our hearts seem to burst into flame, as we catch a better understanding of God's heart, and as we begin to understand how we can help that vision become a reality.

Our hearts catch fire when we listen to the Lord's call on our lives, and respond. Our hearts catch fire when we recall our Father's love for us, when the Word was made flesh and became human, to live among us. Our hearts catch fire when we consider Jesus' love for us, and His love for the Father. Our hearts catch fire when we remember that He is present to us now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, which first made Himself known on Pentecost in the form of a literally burning fire.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, when we witness baptisms, as we will in just a moment, when young Michael Takacs is baptized, our hearts catch fire, as we remember and see how the Lord still calls us unto Himself, and gives us tactile gifts that we can see and hear and touch and smell and taste. When we read scripture, our hearts can catch fire as we study what Jesus did when He was alive on earth. When we pray, our hearts can catch fire as we get to know God better, as we come to know Jesus better. And when we take that Good News of salvation out into the world, we help the hearts of the weary and hopeless kindle again into flame, as they learn that they are not alone, that we are messengers, angels, of the Lord, who bring cups of living Water to the thirsty, the Bread of Life to those who hunger, the Presence of the Risen Lord to those who are alone in their despair. What a friend we have in Jesus, indeed! What friends we can be as we behave as Jesus did, when He walked the earth! And now it's time to introduce Him to this lost and broken world, which needs that Friend so much. May we manifest Jesus in our words and in our deeds, as we serve, with hearts aflame, until He comes again. And even so, come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Luke 24: 13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?" 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be condemned to death and crucified Him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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." Then He said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, He walked ahead as if He were going on. 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. When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 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?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and He has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.