

**Text: Luke 24:13 - 35 (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup>Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup>As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup>but they were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup>One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" <sup>19</sup>"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup>The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup>but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup>In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup>but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." <sup>25</sup>He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. <sup>28</sup>As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup>They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" <sup>33</sup>They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup>and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup>Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

**Theme: God's Word Is the Fire that Opens our Eyes, Hearts, and Mouths**

Many years ago I went to an evangelism workshop, hoping to learn many things about spreading the Gospel. The only thing that I remember is the sermon in the closing service. It had three parts, which were, 1) Christ commanded us to share the Gospel, 2) You've done a bad job at it, and 3) Now get out there and do a better job or else Jesus will be very angry. Nothing has ever left me as uninspired to share the Gospel as that sermon, but there was something good about it. It got me thinking about why we as Christians share our faith in Christ. The reason is not because we have to or because God will be angry if we don't. It is because God's Word has opened our eyes and hearts to see Jesus as our Savior. When we know Him as our Savior, our mouths can't help but open to declare the wonderful things that He has done for us.

**I. It is not easy to share God's Word.**

God's prophets in the Old Testament could attest to that. In today's Old Testament lesson Jeremiah complained that God's Word had brought him insult and reproach all day long. (Jer 20:8) In the verses just before this the priest Pashhur had Jeremiah beaten and put into stocks. Because of all of the things that happened to him, Jeremiah would have rather said nothing, but God's word was like a burning fire within him. He had to speak it, and when he did, it got him into trouble. Jeremiah

wasn't like us. He was given God's Word and had to proclaim it. God called him to be a prophet. When Jeremiah declined, God wouldn't take "no" for an answer. God told him that it wouldn't be easy, but He also promised, "*Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.*" (Jer 1:8)

The Apostles could also attest to how difficult it is to share God's Word. In Acts 3 Peter and John healed a crippled beggar. Then they were brought to the Sanhedrin where Peter proclaimed, "*Salvation is found in no one else [other than Jesus], for there is no other name given to men by which we must be saved.*" The Sanhedrin commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. When the apostles continued to do so, they were arrested again. This time they were whipped and again ordered not to speak in Jesus' name anymore. Shortly thereafter Stephen was martyred. We also think of Paul's trials as he shared the Gospel. He was beaten, imprisoned, and slandered.

The road to sharing the Gospel was not easy for the Emmaus' disciples. They saw Jesus die. They knew that His body was laid in the grave. Things didn't go the way that they had planned at all. They were very sad when the Lord came up to them.

It is not always easy for us to share the Gospel either. I am sometimes afraid that we are given the idea that if we just share the Gospel, people will start flocking to us. But that is simply not true. We are afraid of being rejected. Sometimes that is exactly what happens, even from our family. We are afraid of being mocked. Again, that is often what happens. In such cases we are like Jeremiah. It seems like God's Word has made us a laughingstock. It sometimes brings us insult and reproach. At other times God hasn't worked the way that we wanted in our lives. We might even wonder whether He has failed us. We might feel betrayed like Jeremiah did or downcast like the Emmaus disciples. At such times it is very difficult to proclaim the wonders that God has done.

## II. The Gospel of Jesus opens our eyes and sets our hearts ablaze.

When Jeremiah remembered God's goodness, it would give him strength and hope. He also says in chapter 20, "*The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail... Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.*" In today's epistle lesson Peter reminds us that we are a people who belong to God. Once we were nobody, but now we are the people of God who have received His mercy. In the Gospel lesson, the Emmaus disciples were very sad. Then Jesus began to explain to them how He fulfilled the Old Testament. Finally, they recognized Him in the breaking of the bread when He gave it to them.

Our eyes are opened to see Jesus and our hearts are set ablaze when we hear the Gospel that Jesus died and rose for our salvation. The hearts of the Emmaus disciples were burning as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. God's Word often burns within our hearts. We long to have the forgiveness, the life, and the salvation that Jesus has won by His death and resurrection. But our eyes are opened when that salvation is offered to us. When we hear those words, "Given and shed **for you** for the forgiveness of **your** sins," when we are told that in the name of Christ all of our sins are forgiven," and when we are baptized into His name. It is marvelous when our eyes are opened and we see Jesus as our Savior. We trust in His forgiveness. Like Jeremiah we trust that He is with us and will rescue

us from every evil. We look forward to our eternal life and the resurrection of the dead that His resurrection assures us of. It is the most blessed thing when that Gospel of Jesus Christ opens our hearts and eyes to see Jesus as our Savior. We love Him, and we trust in Him as our Savior and Lord.

III. It is that faith and love in Christ that motivates us to share the Gospel.

It was almost evening, and it was a long way back to Jerusalem, but these two men had to go and tell the disciples that they had seen the Lord. They wanted to tell the whole story of how He spoke to them on the road and was revealed in the breaking of the bread. The apostles also had good news for them. They said, *“The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”*

The best witnesses of the Gospel today are people who simply share what the Lord has done for them and want others to know that Christ is their Savior too. I think of an example many years ago in a Denny’s Restaurant. We were eating with some friends, talking about my vicarage church, when one of the waitresses told us that she wanted to share her story with us. She confessed that she had led a sinful life and was addicted to drugs and alcohol, but God found her, saved her, and freed her from those addictions. She couldn’t help but want to talk about what God did for her. It wasn’t too long ago that a man I know, who is always rather quiet about his faith, saw how God was working in his life. He shared that with me and later with a larger crowd. He couldn’t help but declare what the Lord had done for him. I am sure that both of these people have received some ridicule and even worse when they have shared their faith, but their eyes have been opened. God’s Word has brought them to see Christ as their Savior. They cannot help but declare the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The motivation for us to talk about our Savior is our faith in Jesus Christ. We proclaim His death for us when we gather as we do this day to receive His Supper. We raise our children in the faith. We might even pay thousands of dollars for them to attend Christian schools. When we have the opportunity, we want to share Christ with those who are hurting, feeling guilty or are afraid. We don’t do it because we have to, but because we want them to find the same peace in Christ that God has given to us. While we sometimes encounter opposition to the Gospel and it sometimes brings hardship, we can’t help but declare that wonders that God has done for us. In the end God often blesses us to see the power of the Gospel in how that simple message that Jesus died and rose for you, brings faith, comfort, and peace in Christ to others.

Why do we as Christians share the Gospel? It is not because we have to because we fear punishment if we don’t. It is because God’s Word has opened our hearts and eyes to see Jesus as our Savior. When we know His love for us, that faith also opens our mouths to declare God’s love for those who are in need of His mercy and peace too.

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Amen.