

**Did Our Hearts Not Burn Within Us As He Spoke To Us On The Way And Explained The Scriptures? (Luke 24, 32)**

Cosmas C. Uzowulu OFCap

**Introduction**

The one verse of Luke which we are about to study forms part of the great periscope of Luke 24,13-35. It is about the Emmaus Road and a Meal Discovery. The appearance of Jesus on the Emmaus road is one of Luke's most vivid and dramatic accounts about Jesus, and he narrates the event with great skill and drama.

The account relates the travelers' disappointment over Jesus' death and their curiosity over the empty tomb. Since their "sight" is shrouded, they do not initially recognize Jesus when he joins them. They think that all hope is lost. But things change as their new companion manifests how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the OT. There is a necessity to God's plan. During their meal and table koinonia (fellowship), Jesus gradually reveals himself. Jesus' resurrection thus receives confirmation through an appearance. The travelers are overjoyed at being with Jesus and understanding God's plan as revealed in the Scriptures. Thus: "Did our hearts not burn within us as He spoke to us on the way and explained the Scriptures"? Therefore, failure becomes fulfillment.<sup>i</sup> This study will be in two sections: The first section will be on the analysis of the text, while the second section will be its application and theology.

**1. Meal and Revelation (24,28-32)**

For better understanding of the verse we are analyzing we shall study the verses before our present v. 32. We shall divide the section into three sub-units:

**1.1 The Meal (24,28-29)**

As the two travelers draw near their destination, Jesus "pretended" (Greek *prosepoiesato*) to go on (Greek *porroteron*). Marshall<sup>ii</sup> argues that "pretend" is too strong, although Plummer<sup>iii</sup> observes Mark 6,48 and 7,27 as comparable. The fundamental idea of *prospoieo* is "to act as if" something is about to happen. To "pretend" implies that Jesus was hoping to stay with them and not journey on. It appeared as if the meeting was over, but the travelers' sensitivity and interest change the situation (on this kind of invitation in the OT, see Gen 18,3: 19,2).

The travelers do not intend that Jesus should go on, so they plead with him to stay with them (Greek *parebiasanto*)<sup>iv</sup> John the evangelist employs *meno* in a theological sense to call people to remain or abide in Jesus, but Luke's usage is an example of the term's common meaning. The reason (*hoti*, for) the travelers request Jesus to stay with them is that evening

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approaches (*hespera* in Greek), the day is almost spent (Greek *kekliken*) and perhaps it is unsafe to travel at night.v Jesus “came in to remain with them”, language that is similar to Rev 3,20.vi

## **1.2 Jesus' Revelation (24,30-31)**

The two travelers still do not know who Jesus is as he reclines at the table with them to share a meal of fellowship, which is described in a worshipful, liturgical way:vii he takes bread, offers a blessing, breaks the bread, and gives it to the travelers.viii Why Jesus serves as host for the meal is not clear. Was he the oldest or was it out of respect for his scriptural exposition that he was asked to bless God? The detail appears to show that his hosts knew he was someone special, but just how special he was remains to be seen.

This meal is not a reenactment of the Lord's Supper since there is no wine and nothing is said over the elements. The imperfect *epedidou* (he was distributing) does not indicate continued distribution of the bread as Greek imperfect often shows.x Neither is this the messianic banquet, though it may anticipate this decisive banquet meal that takes place in the eschaton after the gathering of all the saints.xi

Everything changes as the travelers' earlier discussion about what happened to Jesus is settled. The veil is lifted from their eyes, and they realize with whom they are eating.xii The expression “their eyes were opened” is unique in the NT. The theological passive *dianoigo* (to open) is employed with a variety of objects: womb (Luke 2,23), Scripture (Luke 24,31; Acts 17,3), mind (Luke 24,45), heaven (Acts 7,56), heart (Acts 16,14; 2 Macc 1,4), ears (Mark 7,34-35), and eyes (Luke 24,31; Gen 3,5.7; 2 Kgs 6,17). The two travelers recognize Jesus. Luke employs language that reverses what was said about their lack of recognition in 24,16.

Just as quickly, Jesus vanishes from them.xiii With the revelation that Jesus lives, his visible presence is no longer necessary. Dillonxiv rightly observes that the appearance displays continuity between the Jesus of earthly ministry and the raised Jesus who sits over the church. Jesus can personally minister to anyone after his death and resurrection.

## **1.3 The Men's Response**

The two men's reaction almost reflects an absence of surprise. They were excited earlier when they heard Jesus expounds the Scripture and they suspected that someone unusual was in their presence, but they had no idea who he was. Now that they know, it makes sense. Their initial remark is stated as a rhetorical question that expects a positive reply (*ouchi* in Greek which means not). Their hearts were burning (*kaiomene* in Greek) within them as Jesus spoke to them.xv His elucidation gave them intense emotion and excitement. The idiom to light a fire under someone might be comparable to this only NT use of *kaio* (to burn) with this figurative force.xvi The two men had great excitement and comfort at hearing the Scripture opened up to them in this way (*dienoigen* (to open up); Luke 24,31; Acts 17,2-3). They sensed that something unusual was happening, but only after their eyes were opened

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could they see why this man had opened up the Scriptures so clearly to them. They had been treated to a rare tour of the OT and received insight into God's plan as a result.

## **2.0 Application and Theology behind the Text**

As believers it becomes very clear from the above study that disclosure by Jesus and an encounter with him occur in the context of intimacy with him. Two disciples are apparently heading home after a traumatic weekend. They find themselves discussing what had taken place. The discussion seems to have been acute, since the term employed (*syzetein* in Greek) suggests strong debate (cf. its use in Luke 22,23; Acts 6,9; 9,29).<sup>xvii</sup> Perhaps they are arguing about the meaning of the “empty tomb”. Their eyes are kept from recognizing him as Jesus approaches them. Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance in Luke is both normal and mysterious at the same time. He has a normal human appearance, but is different enough that he is not initially known. This description adds to the drama and the mystery of resurrection.

Jesus asks them about their discussion. That question brings them to a halt and their demeanor changes. What they left behind in Jerusalem is painful enough to recall, for hope departed with Jesus' death. With irony one of them, Cleopas, is amazed and asked, “are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” (v.18). Sure, Jesus knows exactly what took place, since it happened to him. No one could have missed what took place, at least if they were circulating among the pilgrim crowds. Nonetheless, Jesus asks, “What things?”

The disciples answer immediately, “About Jesus of Nazareth”, and note his prophetic work as one “powerful in word and deed before God and all the people”. The disciples themselves thought Jesus was more than a prophet and hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel. That was the hope that they saw nailed to a cross in the capital of the Jewish city.

But there is more to tell. Three days later some of the women among the disciples astonished the group.<sup>xviii</sup> They went to the tomb only to find it empty. They likewise revealed angels telling them that Jesus was alive. Other companions (an allusion to Peter and others) went to the tomb and discovered it empty just as the women announced, but Jesus was nowhere to be seen. Cleopas and his companion are baffled by what has taken place. The last thing they expect is resurrection.

Jesus then launches into a rebuke, whose rationale becomes clearer as events move on. He calls them “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe”.

They must believe all that the prophets have spoken, a brief way of referring to the messianic promises of the ancient Scriptures – what Christians call the OT and the Jews call the Tanak (Tanach). The career that Scripture outlines for the Messiah is suffering, then glory. This sequence is necessary, since God designed it. Luke again employs the Greek verb *dei* (which means, “must be” “have to”) to make the point about the divine design. These things must happen since they are part of God's effort to restore relationship with humanity. The Emmaus

## *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*

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discussion underscores the point that the traumatic events surrounding Jesus are part of God's plan of deliverance. What they have seen is not the end of hope, but its beginning.

As the three near their destination at the village, it seems as if Jesus will journey on. But Cleopas and his friend persuade him to stay with them, since the day is nearly over. As Jesus reclines at table with them, he shares a meal. In the rush of the narrative up to this point, there is something calming about this scene. Suddenly, their eyes are opened. They see that it is Jesus. They have been spending time with the one they were discussing. But as soon as they recognize him, he is gone. Hence it is no accident that Jesus is revealed as he sits having table fellowship with the disciples of Emmaus. The table was a place for fellowship in the ancient world.<sup>xix</sup> Here, family and friends gathered to share time with each other. Luke has underlined the importance of meal scenes throughout his gospel. The table was a place where Jesus was heard and where his presence came across most intimately. This fact indicates that Jesus reveals himself in the midst of the basic moments of life. He is at home in the midst of our everyday activity.

The reaction of the disciples of Emmaus communicates no real surprise in the light of what has taken place. Now it all makes sense. It is late, but what they have seen cannot wait to be reported until tomorrow. So they return at once to Jerusalem to meet with the Eleven. But before Cleopas and his companion could get their story out, the report of the truth of the women's story fills the room. "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon". Despair becomes delight as the truth about Jesus' resurrection begins to sink in. Indeed, one could well argue that the letters of the NT, besides being commentary on the cross, are commentary on the resurrection, since everything that we have in Christ ultimately is only possible through the resurrection. So the resurrection is a bridge into new life and the first step of glory that leads to the consummation of his promise.

But it is good to note that the resurrection of Jesus' body is not a big miracle for God. Is God able to raise up a body that has died? Of course God can do that. If God is God, of course God can raise up a body. The unbelievable word of faith that should be spoken to all of us in the Easter story is what the Spirit of God accomplished in the heart of Jesus: that the Spirit freed Jesus' heart so he could let go of himself to God. Even though he did flinch, have questions, and feel doubt, he still remained faithful. That is the great Easter miracle achieved in the humanity of Jesus. Indeed time and again God calls his faithful in Jesus not to success but to faithfulness. As consecrated people, we may have doubts, we may have questions, we may be uncertain over some issues of our life, but the beauty of the journey and our mission is that we continue to say yes to God, we continue to remain faithful.

That miracle of liberation receives a symbolic but REAL expression in the raising up of Jesus' body on Easter Sunday morning. It tells us he is whole, he is for real he is true God-man, the one who holds together heaven and earth. He is the synthesis who is completely of this world and yet gave himself totally to the Father.

For all time Jesus becomes our sign, our promise, our guarantee, our fulfillment. It is all summed up in Jesus: he is the alpha, the middle and the omega. For us, he is everything. He

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is the Word of the Father. He is what God can accomplish in humanity when we say Fiat (Yes) to God. As I said somewhere else, the first faith question that every person seeking to believe is asking is not: “is Jesus God?” but “Can God be trusted?” or “Is God for us?” The resurrection of Jesus is saying, “Yes, God can be trusted. Look at Jesus on the Good Friday. God is and will turn our crucifixions into life.

In this Luke's final chapter (ch 24) the resurrection is a given. It has happened. On the First day of the Week they come looking for him. Notice it is the women coming. Faithful to the end, the women are the ones who listen to the Lord. Luke does not have the disciples coming to the tomb; none of them go looking, except Peter (24,12). It was the women who first believed. In this context, the women are the *anawim*, the little poor ones. Simple people can believe, but many a time the official church and its leaders and ministers are slow to believe. Here the consecrated women can re-discover in this passage, their powerful role and mission in the one Church of Christ. They can use their simple faith and example to sustain the leaders and ministers of the Church of Christ like many great saintly women did in the history of our Religion.

Then comes the beautiful account on the road to Emmaus (the passage we are studying). Some biblical scholars used to suppose that Luke himself was one of the two on the road. We do not know. To what degree it is based on historical fact, we do not know. It is not found in any of the other gospels.

It has those lines we all love to hear, “Did not our hearts burn within us” (24,32) “.....and they knew him in the breaking of bread” (24,35).

In this story, Luke is teaching his community about Christ's presence among them. He hears them asking something like, “Okay, it is the year 80 already, we do not see Jesus anymore, so how is Jesus present to us?” Luke's response is, “He is present in the breaking of bread”.

We know him in this celebration, in the ongoing appropriation of the story. We cannot sit down at the table like the first disciples did. I was not there myself and you were not there either, Luke says, but we can sit at a new table in our Cathedrals, Parishes and Convents and experience the Lord just as the two disciples of Emmaus did, and know him as they did in the breaking of bread – and our hearts will burn within us.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus joins the two men of Emmaus as they walk along, but they do not realize that it is he. What keeps them from recognizing him may be the same thing that keeps us from recognizing him in our own time. With a two-pronged strategy, Jesus will break through this blindness. As Jesus converses with Cleopas and his companion, a wonderful irony emerges: the disciples point to the apparent ignorance of this man about the Crucified Jesus, being quite ignorant themselves that they are speaking to none other than this same Jesus. Jesus gets the disciples to narrate their story. From their story Jesus proceeds to make good the deficit in

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the disciples' understanding of the Scriptures. The disciples after which force hospitality upon Jesus in a manner that reminds one of the hospitality extended to angels in Gen 18,3: 19,2. In the ancient world, hospitality to strangers ranked high as a religious virtue, and there were numerous stories, Jewish and otherwise, about “entertaining angels (or god) unaware” (Heb 13,2). In this context, Cleopas and his companion will find their hospitality well rewarded.

As Jesus breaks the bread, he is recognized. There is no sense, as I argued above, in which Luke is claiming that Jesus celebrated a *koinonia* service with these two disciples; rather, Luke wants to make the point that the Christians of his day were able to have the living Lord made known to them in their “breaking of bread” in a manner that was at least analogous to the experience of the Emmaus disciples. The disciples thought they had gone home for the evening, but their previous plans no longer appeared appropriate. They must return to Jerusalem to share the good news with the members. As consecrated men and women, we have experienced and encountered the Lord and nothing should prevent us – like the disciples of Emmaus – from sharing and communicating this good news to all men and women we meet daily in our areas of Apostolate and Mission.

### **ENDNOTES**

i.

Cf. J. A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke (x-xxiv)* (Anchor Bible 28A; Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1985) 1557-59, notes four Lucan emphases: (1) the geographic journey,

(2) Jesus' gradual revelation of himself, (3) Christology and fulfillment of OT prophecy, and

(4) the meal scenes. Fitzmyer sees the meal as “Eucharistic”; although there is breaking of

bread and thanksgiving, it is not a Eucharistic, especially given the absence of wine.

ii.

I. H. MARSHALL, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC;

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 897.

iii.

A. PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St.*

*Luke* (ICC: Edinburgh: Scribner, 1896) 556.

52 Did Our Hearts Not Burn Within Us As He Spoke To Us On The Way And Explained The Scriptures? (Luke 24, 32)

iv.

## *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*

Vol. 10, 2014. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

Parabiazomai usually means “to use force” on someone, but here “quiet persuasion” is meant, which is similar to the use of the un-prefixed form in the difficult 16,16. On the importance of hospitality in Judaism, see PHILO, On Abraham 22#107-13; similarly JOSEPHUS, Antiquities 1.11.2 #196.

v.

Cf. FITZMYER, The Gospel according to Luke (x-xxiv),1567; similarly, PLUMMER, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke, 557-58.

vi.

Cf. W. GRUNDMANN, Das Evangelium nach Lukas (THNT 3; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1963) 447; similarly, MARSHALL, The Gospel of Luke, 897-98; likewise, J. ERNST, Das Evangelium nach Lukas (RNT 3; Regensburg, 1977) 663. See also these other biblical passages, Judg 19,9; Tob 10,8; Luke 7,36; 11,37; 19,5; John 1,38; Acts 16,15.

vii.

Meals are frequent in Luke: simple meals (7,36; 11,37; 14,1), feasts (5,29), miraculous provisions (9,16), cultic meals (22,14), wedding feasts (14,8-9), and the eschatological banquet (12,37; 13,29); G. R., The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 123 n.26; similarly, PLUMMER, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke, 556. That Jesus ate such meals with the “wrong people” is noted in 15,1 and 19,1.

viii.

On breaking bread, see Matt 14,19 = Mark 6,41 = Luke 9,16 = John 6,11; Matt 15,36 = Mark 8,6; Matt 26,26 = Mark 14,22 = Luke 22,19; Mark 8,19; Acts 2,42.46; 20,7.11; 27,35; John 6,11; 1 Cor 10,16; 11,24.

ix.

See this in his giving the blessing.

x.

Cf. PLUMMER, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St.

Luke, 556.

xi.

That the participants do not even know that they were sitting with Jesus speaks against seeing the messianic banquet here; but so argues F. W. DANKER, Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel (revised edition; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 394.

xii.

The first occurrence of the personal pronoun auton (their) is slightly emphatic since it is separated from its modifier.

xiii.

Cf. FITZMYER, The Gospel according to Luke (x-xxiv) 1568.

xiv.

R. J. DILLON., From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the  
Word: Tradition and

Composition in Luke 24 (Analecta Biblica 82; Rome: PBI, 1978) 155.

xv.

## *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*

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The distributive singular kardia (heart) shows that the heart burned in each of them, cf. MARSHALL, *The Gospel of Luke*, 898. The periphrastic idiom pictures a running emotion, see PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 557-58. On the sense of kardia in Luke see, 1,51.66: 2,19.35.51; 3,15; 5,22; 9,47; 24,25. See also, D. L. TIEDE, *Luke (ACNT; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988)* 437.

xvi.

For other figurative uses see Ps 39,3 (39,4 MT); 73,21; K. SCHMIDT, TDNT 3:464. And for literal uses of kaio, see Matt 5,15; 13,40; Luke 12,35; John 5,35; 15,6; Heb 12,18; Rev 4,5; 8,8.10; 19,20; 21,8.

xvii

Cf. J. SCHNEIDER, “Suze teo” in TDNT, 7.747.

xviii.

The wor for “amazed” appears frequently in Luke-Acts for catching someone off guard (Luke 2,47; 8,56; Acts 8,9.11).

xix.

Cf. D. L. BOCK, *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan:

Zondervan, 1996) 616.

Cosmas C. Uzowulu OFCap (LSS, PhD) is a Lecturer at the Spiritan International School of Theology Attakwu-Enugu, where he teaches Biblical Greek, New Testament Exegesis and Theology. He is also a Visiting Lecturer at the Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu.