Series: “All Things New”
Sermon: “Stirred Hearts”
Luke 24:13-32
April 7, 2013

As one of the leaders of ZPC, I was one of a handful who initially knew the target number for the 2013-2014 budget would be $300,000 less than last year’s in the category of salaries and benefits. As part of Session, I was aware that decision making about who would remain as part of senior level staff would come after the March meeting. Going into that time, Laura and I (and the other senior staff and spouses) were totally at peace about possible outcomes. We remain in that peace. Session was courageous and strategic to take things so deep that two of three senior staff members are being released, and as we have heard this morning, now there are four part-time staffers who are also not going to remain on staff. These are decisions that have come with great heart and appreciation for us all. Our elders have paved the way to a right-sizing that is so needed for the immediate future and for when a new pastor comes to join you in ministry.

That leaves Laura and me taking a step we have never taken before. In all our career transition points we have been the ones to say to the congregation we were serving, “We love you. We have a new call. We are leaving you to pursue that call.” This time we have heard, “We love you. We believe God will give you a new call. You are leaving us.” We Smiths have come to understand that living the way of Jesus is always an adventure every single moment. We accept with all of our hearts that God is shaping something good for us even now. You have been part of our adventure. We will hold you dear to our hearts as we step into the new things God has in store.

We ask for your continuing prayers for us even as we continue in prayer for you. At the end of the morning, I will no longer be one of your pastors. We look forward to hearing how God is shaping you all under Scott’s ministry and how you as Session, Deacons, lay leaders, members and friends lean forward into God’s plans. I do need to let you know that I am totally committed to honoring Scott’s role and your future pastor’s role by not engaging in pastoral ministry with you. This is a very important adjustment that we all need to make. You will always be dear to our hearts. You might even run into us around town at least for a while since we are here for the present time. And, if you think you might know a great fit for me or Laura in ministry or business opportunities out in the real world, please keep us in mind. We are totally open to what God may ask of us at this juncture.

As we get into our car later this morning, we will start our drive to Ft. Worth, Texas to see our elder son, Caleb, his wife, Tisha and their sons, Jackson and Tucker. We haven’t yet visited them since their move last fall. We are excited to see them and take care of the boys the last half of the week while their folks go on a vacation together. One week from tomorrow, Laura and I will drive from Ft. Worth to Kansas City for an annual gathering of a group of pastors I am part of from around the country. On Wednesday the 17th, we will get in our car and head east back to our home in Zionsville. We recognize that will feel different since it will be a drive into the unknown.

Laura has been in Wisconsin most of this past week with her mom who had a heart valve replacement on Tuesday. We’ve talked every day. A few days ago she asked, “How is it with your heart?” “Hmmm,” I replied, “That’s a good question.” I can affirm my heart is stirred with

the sense of peace and adventure I've already described. My heart is also sad at the reality of our departure and separation from you and this ministry. My heart is filled with gratitude for our time here as part of this family of Christ. My heart is perplexed about how I might ever make total sense of all we have been through here. My heart is trusting as I can leave it all in God's hands for the fruit bearing God has in mind through it all. My heart, to get down to the deepest level, is deeply, deeply well because I know God to be rich in grace, mercy and love. These things are so real when we surrender all that we know of ourselves to all that we know of God in each and every moment. I'm reminded of a favorite passage of Scripture, one I committed to memory in college, one that is appropriate for today:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.
Proverbs 3:5-6

Friends, how is it with your heart? Honestly.

To get our bearings a bit, let's look at our text for the morning. Turn with me in your bibles to Luke chapter twenty-four. We pick up Luke's account of the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead which we celebrated last Sunday. Jim Capps, our interim pastor, on his last Sunday with us, led us to consider how a resurrection from the dead was the last thing on the minds of Jesus' followers after he was crucified, dead and buried. Any thought of something other than dead and buried for all time would have been sheer nonsense. Even the word from some of the women that the tomb was empty and that angels told them Jesus was alive was received as foolishness. When Peter, the new rabbi of the band, checked it out for himself, he left the empty tomb as Luke tells us in verse twelve, "wondering to himself what had happened." Everything is thrown into confusion. Someone coming to Luke's account for the first time must surely come to this point in the story breathless and eager to read what happens next. So, let's find out what happens. I'll start reading in verse thirteen. Please follow along. Remember this is God's holy word. [READ Luke 24:13-32.] Whenever we read the bible, God intends us to gain understanding by his spirit. I pray that will be true for each of us here this morning.

Friends, we do not have much time this morning, so while there is so much we could note about this text, I want to zero in on one aspect that I believe is central to the text and of extreme importance to us this morning. Jim Capps has spoken of this next chapter being like a new church start for ZPC, and I love the heart behind this affirmation. But, this is a new start, a fresh beginning precisely because there has already been a start, there was already a beginning, we have history with one another and with God. So, this fresh start for ZPC, anticipating another fresh start when your next pastor arrives, is freighted with all that has come before over our thirty year history. Wherever you have come into that history, however you come to this fresh start, there is a shared life that has come before and a life to step into from this moment on. It is a continuous story.

The theme I want to draw out for us this morning at this point where past and future meet in the present is what it means to notice, to live with attentiveness.

Look at verse fourteen. "They were talking with each other about everything that had happened." My guess is that this was all about what had happened that morning in the garden as far as they knew. But, it had to also, I think, have them thinking back a few days to the

crucifixion and burial, the sealing of the tomb, the Roman guards placed there and the terror with which they and the other disciples lived since the arrest of their master. They must have also had in mind all they had been through over the past years. They and others had been drawn to Jesus. They had proven themselves dimwitted and flat out disobedient at times. They were witnesses of miracles and faith coming alive. They had moments of lucid clarity and times of dismal denseness. They were in turn praised by their rabbi Jesus and chastised by him. They got it right and wrong. Over these past days they had seen their hopes and dreams dashed to pieces. How could it have all gone awry completely? And, yet, on this day there were fresh conflicting reports. What in the world were they to make of it?

If you've been around ZPC for very long, you like me, have found yourself talking about everything that has happened, the good, the bad and the ugly. And, just as you might get some sense that things are changing for the better, something else happens to cause you pause. We've been living on a roller coaster for years and years, and over the past three years it seems as if the wheels have come off.

And that is just where they are when someone comes up on their journey and walks along with them long enough to hear them and sense their concerns and confusion. This man notices them. And, we know the end of the story and know it is Jesus. I love this. Why did Jesus come to these two disciples? Why did he notice them? Let me just venture that Jesus always notices people and circumstances. He takes note and, like all heroes, he shows up at just the right time and in just the right way. It has to be of particular importance that Jesus appears to these two among all the other Jesus way people that day. We know from another gospel that he has appeared to Mary Magdalene that morning when she was standing alone and then to her and some of the other women at another moment. In both cases, those who saw him alive again were to go tell the men. So, why these two? Why use up valuable time to walk along with them like any normal traveler? What gives?

At the simplest level, Jesus came to them because they needed him. They were in need, and he chose to step in. He is right there! They don't recognize his presence for a long time on that walk, time enough for him to ask an invitational question (verse 17: "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"), to listen to their summary of his life and ministry and what had transpired over the previous few days, to chastise them for their obtuseness and then to walk them through the writings of Moses and the Prophets and (verse 27, "He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself"). They needed Jesus to love them, listen to them, meet them, walk with them, correct them and teach them.

We need Jesus to do that for us.

I think there is more at work than just their need for him. He needed them. He needed them to listen to him. He needed them to know and tell others what he told them so they would get out from under the cloud of despair, doubt, disappointment, disunity and defeatism and step into the reality that all of their three year long and three day long story had to take place. This was not the end. It was the continuation of God's story. And the story was at a new beginning. These two needed to be the spokespeople for the declaration that God was still on the move and they and the others could be part of God's unfolding plan. That is true for you as ZPC. It is true for Laura and for me. Jesus notices us. He meets us at our points of need. He is the God who comes as the one who makes all things new.

Isn't it a remarkable thing that they did not recognize the presence of Jesus during the time they spent together? There he was right there with them, and they were so into themselves they did not know it was him. That happens to us all the time. We are so busy living we don't recognize Jesus with us. He notices us. We need to notice him.

Once the disciples realized it was Jesus, what is the remarkable description they give for what it was like to walk with Jesus, to have him intensely engage with them, in their own words in verse thirty-two, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

In the 1870s, a seventeen year old was a student at the Western Female Seminary in Oxford, Ohio. She slipped a note to one of the teachers. In it she pled for the prayers of the faculty and her fellow students with these words "I have discovered of late that hitherto it has been with me, 'some of self and some of Christ.' Will my teachers and school-mates unite with me in earnest prayer that henceforth it may be 'none of self, and all of Christ?'

Her heart's cry is similar to that of 16th Century reformer John Calvin. of the Catholic Church and the father of Presbyterianism, had as his motto and symbol a hand holding a burning heart, with the prayer, "My heart I offer to You, Lord, promptly and sincerely."



Presbyterian frontier missionary J. W. Blythe describes riding from cabin to cabin to preach in Indiana in 1832. As the customary twenty to fifty people arrived, he noted,

> It was a uniform custom, broken with few exceptions, for every man to carry his hat upon his head—even after he entered the house. But as soon as I rose for the service, every hat was placed upon the floor beside and within reach of the owner's hand. And thus they sat while listening to God's Word, even though that word was spoken by an almost beardless boy. It marked the reverence of those uncultivated men for this Word. Before it they would sit or stand uncovered and before nothing else.
> (From Hoosier Zion: The Presbyterians in Early Indiana, L. C. Rudolph, Yale University Press, 1963, pg. 88.)

The heart is precisely what God observes and addresses in human beings. He cares little or nothing for outward show. He responds to the heart because it is, above all, who we are: who we choose and have chosen to be. What God wants of us can only come from there.
Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, pg. 148

One clearly sees the violent struggle between hope and fear that raged in their hearts. And this gives us a clear picture of what went on that day in the hearts of all the other perplexed followers of the Crucified One.
The Gospel of Luke, Norval Geldenhuys, pg 633

It was opening day for the Indianapolis Indians on Thursday. A few days before that, Washington Post columnist E. J. Dionne wrote about a friend of his, John Sexton, president of New York University and author of Baseball as a Road to God. Dionne writes, "The national pastime, [Sexton] rightly insists, provides an excellent window onto the sacred, even as all that is good and holy helps you to understand baseball." Later in the column Sexton is quoted again as he gives in a few spare lines a synopsis of the baseball life as "interminable bus trips, tobacco spit, sunflower seeds, rain delays, day-night doubleheaders and storytelling. There's a lot of standing in the outfield, shagging fly balls, and swapping lies." What a life! Right? And then, Dionne quotes Sexton's five word affirmation of baseball's central calling: it is "to live slow and notice." (The Indianapolis Star, April 1, 2013)

God is making all things new for us and for you. Live slow. Notice Jesus. As you do, living with uncovered hearts, God will be able to shape you individually and this ministry in all the ways God knows will bear the greatest fruit. Jesus notices you. He walks with you. Let us open our hearts to him so that they burn with his presence and we give ourselves for his purposes.