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THE MARK

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony - A Contemplative Christian Community



*Blessed are they who
hunger and thirst for
righteousness*

THE FINEST HUNGER

by Tim Cook

I think I was about six years old when I had one of my first real moments of pondering the way life works. I had asked my Mom about how our vacuum cleaner worked. She told me, in response, that “nature abhors a vacuum.” And she explained how empty spaces are opportunities waiting to be filled and that the act of filling involved a movement from “the area of greatest concentration to the area of least concentration.” I remember being amazed as I began to see this wondrous mechanism at work everywhere around me in both the natural and physical worlds.

It is obvious to me now that the whole of life’s activity is a vast dance of exchanges that are made possible by empty spaces and life’s infinite capacity to fill them. The baby birds that raise their wobbly little heads and open-wide their outsized beaks are a perfect example of the process. The greater concentration of worms in the parent bird’s beak moves to fill the lesser concentration of worms in the baby’s stomach. Any baby bird that fails to send the right signals of emptiness doesn’t get fed; not because the parent isn’t caring or capable but because the baby is

out of tune with the principle. First the hunger, the vacuum, then nature can abhor it by filling it. First the request, then the response. Life is just set up that way. Jesus was clear and unequivocal in referring to this principle when He told us, *“Ask and it shall be given...for everyone who asks receives.”* The Work sums up the idea in one simple, powerful statement: “The Universe is response to request.”

Now that seems simple enough on the face of it, but it becomes a lot more complicated when it comes down to the actual practice of a human being living a harmonious and balanced life. Birds, and all other creatures but man, can attend to and ask for only what is required for them by their nature. Humans, however, with our free will and free, wide-ranging attention and imagination, can fix on virtually anything that exists and make it the object of our request, whether it is good for us or not. Here the old saying, “What gets your attention gets you,” takes on a critical meaning. We can hunger for and ask for things that do not serve our true and highest good and the inviolable principle, “Ask

and it shall be given,” goes to work filling our off-target hungers with experiences that do not nourish our souls and may even starve our souls.

What nourishes the human soul, is, of course, intimacy with God. With it all other aspects of our lives become congruent, balanced and meaningful. Without it there is only an endless wandering through impoverished possibilities, always hoping that the next experience we swallow will be the one that satisfies our hunger. When we are rightly aligned with reality we are like little birds with beaks open to God, knowing in faith that He will, in fact must, feed us with the food of His righteousness. Everyone who asks receives.

Christ points to this very issue in the fourth beatitude from His beautiful Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* (Matthew 5:6) The word that is translated here as blessed comes from the same root word as bliss and carries the meaning of happiness. Oh how happy are those that hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God because they are going to get their fill and

everything else as well. If we open the vacuum of our spiritual hunger, God will fill us with Himself, and because He is God, everything we could possibly need comes with Him. Jesus points out that nonbelievers have their attention on themselves or on things and experiences found in the physical, the world revealed by the senses, but they only reap worry and trouble for the efforts. He advises us to:

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ... do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:33-34

Raising our spiritual hunger to God is sufficient to meet every other need.

But here is another challenge for human beings that poses an even greater difficulty for us. It manifests in us as a complacency with ourselves, as we are, and keeps us from asking at all. In this condition we are like little birds in the nest who don't feel their hunger,


so they don't open their mouths for the food even when the parent is right there with the worm. God is always, in every moment, offering to feed each and every one of us with Himself and His righteousness. Most of the time, though, most of us human beings are so filled with unconscious self-righteousness that we are not even dimly aware of how much we need Him or how starved we are. We may be so accustomed to the absence of deep peace and true joy, spiritual starvation, that we don't miss it and are not aware that we only have to ask to receive it. If we don't make a request the Universe simply can't make a response. It's not that it won't; it can't. Jesus illustrates this point like this:

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or

even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:9-14

When we recognize our true situation, that we are absolutely incapable of being satisfied by the things of the world and that we are utterly dependent on God for everything, then we are humble before the wonder of His love for us. That humility, knowing our proper place in the vast system of Creation, is a vacuum, a hunger that God can fill because we are aware of it and aware of our total need for that which only He can give. Hunger for God and His righteousness is a real request that opens us to His very real response. 

CLEANSING THE LENS OF PERCEPTION

by Barbara Cook


Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus said to the people, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” We mustn’t think that they were speaking only to the people of their own time, who were somehow not as smart as we are now, some 2000 years later. I think that he was and is calling to all of us that there are many levels of consciousness and that the ordinary, superficial level of consciousness is self-centered. And like the consciousness of the world around us, the same self-involved, extremely limited awareness prevents us from truly hearing and seeing what God is saying to all of us.

From our immature, self-centered point of view, we may feel self-righteous about our own seeming centrality—the rightness of our limited views. But Jesus warned us about this trap. He said that our righteousness must be greater than the superficial, legalistic righteousness of the Pharisees if we wish to experience the Kingdom of God. He warned us not to judge by appearances because we don’t really know what we are seeing or what we are doing. We are spiritually blind.

As children of God we are all invited to share in the righteousness

of our Father who is Love Itself, merciful and gracious. He heals our spiritual blindness and opens our ears more deeply to His Truth. He leads us by His Spirit through the purification of our emotional center through our contemplative prayer practice. And as we become increasingly aware of our own limited point of view, our emotional programming from infancy and childhood will be visible to us. In the light of His loving consciousness, we are free to release old patterns

through scathing self-honesty

As we relax into our twice-daily periods of Centering Prayer and experience the loving depths of consciousness on retreats, the lens of our perception begins to clear, our sight becomes truer and our hearing opens. We become increasingly aware of the needs of others and we are relieved of the immoral burden of selfishness. Then we will see as our Creator and Sustainer sees with the truly righteous clarity of love. 

THE WHOLENESS OF LIFE IS GOD

It is time for a new catholicity, a new religion of the world (to use Teilhard’s idea), a liberated Church with the Spirit-filled Christ empowering us to become artisans of a new future. God is the power of unconditional love, the transcendent One who dwells in and authenticates our darkness. Transcendence does not loom over us; rather, we are its privileged bearer. Thus, we are to think so as to unify and love with a grateful heart. To live in catholicity is to be conscious that each life breath that I call my own belongs to the stars, the galaxies, my neighbors and family, my enemies, past generations, and those to come. I am part of a whole, like you, and the whole is more than any one of us can grasp because the absolute wholeness of life is Love itself—God—the power of the future. We need to let go of trying to control life and wildly fling ourselves into the arms of divine Love. This is the only real way into the future of life. We have the power to create a new world, and we have the power to destroy this one. How we choose depends on how we grasp *this* moment as the kiss of God, impelling us to stand up and speak.

Ilia Delio, *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness*, pages 199-200.

CONTEMPLATIVE RESPONSE TEAM TRAINING

Saturday, April 16, 2016
9 am-noon

A three-hour training will be offered at no charge for members in our community who desire to participate in contemplative service to the CCH community through prayer, spiritual companionship, and compassionate hospitality. If you are a CCH member with an established Centering Prayer practice of at least two years and feel the interior call of the spirit to participate in an ongoing formation/discernment process, please prayerfully consider attending.

The training covers topics related to exploring our motivations for helping versus rescuing, listening skills, boundaries, and expressions of suffering. Role-playing and interactive teaching techniques will be used frequently to give a more realistic insight into the compassionate, contemplative-response to companionship.

The team meets monthly on Saturday mornings from 9-10:15 to pray, explore topics of contemplative service and review opportunities for service within our community.

Previous participants have expressed that one of the added values of the program is it raises self-awareness in how you respond to the needs of others in your life outside of our church community.

Please preregister with
the office. 512.347.9673 or
officemgr@consciousharmony.org

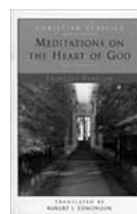
CCH BOOKSTORE

SUGGESTED TITLES FOR APRIL

The New Man
An interpretation of some parables
and miracles of Christ
by Maurice Nicoll



Things Hidden
Scripture as Spirituality
by Richard Rohr



Meditations on the Heart of God
by Francois Fenelon



Meditation of the Parables of Jesus
by Thomas Keating

BOOKSTORE AND LIBRARY HOURS
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



Come, O you blessed of my Father! Matthew 25:34

ANNUAL AIM: BLESSED

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness
for they will be satisfied.*

A DEEPER CONNECTION by Hank Blackwell

Those who long to understand
what is that goodness of being
and what is that knowledge of Truth
that lead to the higher level -
they are those who,
feeling their nothingness, ... long
to be taught what Truth
the higher Man must know
and follow what Good means
at the level
of the Kingdom of Heaven.
They hunger for Good
and thirst for Truth,
for the union of these two ...
makes ... the inner harmony
called righteousness.

Maurice Nicoll, *The New Man*

At all times they look forward
to God's future righteousness,
but they cannot bring it about
by themselves.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*

*I will feed you with the finest of the wheat.
And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.*

Psalm 81:17

The morning of New Year's
Eve dawned cold and sunny. The
towering sandstone cliffs caught
the high desert sunlight early.
It was a delightful view outside
my small room. I had come to
a contemplative retreat at Ghost
Ranch, New Mexico, which is a
wonderful meeting place run by the
Presbyterian Church for decades.
This ranch was owned by Arthur
and Phoebe Pack who purchased
the 21,000 acres in 1936. Prior
to the family handing it to the
Presbyterian Church in 1955, it
was a working ranch, and included
the home of Georgia O'Keefe
and others. Ghost Ranch was a
familiar, welcome and sacred place
for me. The annual New Mexico

Men's Wellness fall conference had
been here for about thirty years,
and I had attended many of these
remarkable gatherings. Several
times in the past I had booked
myself a small room for several days
just to experience the meditative
and healing nature of the area.
Here I was again. I had chosen
to welcome the new calendar year
here as 2015 had been incredibly
difficult for me; a year of loss, pain,
and sadness mixed with lovely and
joyful moments. My hope was to sit
with God, in silence, in the safety of
Ghost Ranch. There, I wished to let
go of a good deal of pain, and step
into 2016 with a deeper connection
to the Divine, my own heart, and
more measures of loving kindness.

Needless to say, what I was hoping to receive was very different from what I experienced.

I came prepared with Thomas Keating's *Daily Reader for Contemplative Living* and *The Human Condition*, Maurice Nicoll's *Simple Explanation of Work Ideas*, my Bible, and my journal. I was clearly exhibiting the free will of a human being attempting to live a contemplative Christian life. Despite my plans, the outcome of the retreat was not expected.

Earlier in the year, as my marriage was breathing its last breaths, I was away from home on another business trip. During that time, I was contacted by a sibling with news that my mother had been diagnosed with stage four metastatic cancer and was given just a few months to live. I went directly to my mother's home in New Mexico. There, for the next five weeks, I stayed with her. During that stay, I had also attempted to maintain the focus of my siblings on the value and significance of caring for our mother in her last days rather than falling into our normal family dysfunction. Five weeks later, my mother died peacefully. A few days later, both my marriage and my relationship with a troubled, younger sibling ended. That was just the beginning to a year of additional challenges and unexpected turns.

During these times, my practice of Centering Prayer became incredibly powerful. Meeting

Abba in silence had become the cornerstone of my emotional survival. My choice to consent to the Presence of that great mystery within surely kept me vertical and awake during these times of sadness and immense loss.

“Man as distinct from other forms of life, has a chance in this difficult world... He has that in him which comes from above...”

Maurice Nicoll

As a sentient being, with the gift of free will, the choice to set aside time to sit with open heart and quiet mind became, quite frankly, my life raft, my outline, my daily plan. I noticed that, although my Centering Prayer was not always consistent, the gift of this practice was powerful. As Fr. Keating says, “It’s about showing up.” This practice, coupled with the Welcoming Prayer, or as Mary Dwyer calls it, “consent on the go,” was and remains instrumental in my life and in my ability to deal with challenges in a way that diminishes fear and anger and brings patience, love and acceptance into each situation. Many times each day, I silently repeat these words:

“Welcome, welcome. I let go of the desire for security, affection, control. I let go of the desire to change what I am experiencing.”

This daily mantra has been a

powerful and effective tool for “in the moment” situations. It is a loving reminder about the Divine presence and indwelling, most importantly, in the midst of challenges. This was incredibly powerful during my mother's last days, the family “drama” surrounding her dying and the dissolution of my home and marriage. These simple, yet profound practices were critical in reminding me that my role was to be present and loving for my mother's last days, to be patient and firm in reminding my family to leave historical drama outside and stay focused, in love, on my mother's comfort and support. Meeting God in the silence offers peace and patience through the day. Our traditional family drama was dramatically muted due to a daily Centering Prayer practice that kept the Divine in my heart and on my shoulder in the presence of powerful family triggers. This was proof, for me, of the loving presence of the Great Mystery. I long for this powerful and loving company!

Several months later, I was diagnosed with a serious health condition. My immediate reaction was, “You’ve got to be kidding! Enough!” This quickly evolved into the “poor me” thoughts. Thankfully, the Welcoming Prayer entered into my awareness. The consistency of my Centering Prayer practice improved. Slowly and gently, the reassuring presence of the Divine embraced me. Yet there was no

solace in accepting God's will; that has always felt too passive to me. Rather, the value was the recognition that, in all of life's challenges, we are never alone; we do not have to bear the burden of life by ourselves. We always have loving, caring Company.

Blessed be the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before Him.

Ephesians 1:3

In this portion of Paul's letter, he re-unites belief and behavior, reminding us that living out our entire humanity is the foundation of our creation. Being human, with our spiritual practices, our missteps, our fears, our successes, remains for me a powerful reminder. I continue to fall. That is why I have a practice of contemplative Christianity. I have a practice of loving kindness. I am showing up ... striving to become awake; conscious. "The primary factor in creation is consciousness," as Eckhart Tolle tells us, and this is fundamental to our existence.

As the first day of January dawned at Ghost Ranch, so did my realization, my consciousness. The Gregorian measurement of a new year had changed nothing.

I still had a long, unclear path before me. Grieving was still present. Pain and sadness had not mysteriously vanished at the turn of midnight. Fortunately, my practice was alive and well. The beauty of the Divine had never left my heart or my side. The gift of that cold New Year's morning is explained beautifully by Fr. Keating:

"... going beyond the sacred word into union with that to which it points – the ultimate mystery, the presence of God, beyond any perception that we can form."

God had gently granted me one of the many lessons. The new year had not changed; what I had hoped to see changed. In fact, the one and only thing that had not changed, and would never change, was the presence of the Divine indwelling. This was the powerful lesson that I was given. The words of Thomas Keating returned to me that cold, New Year's morning, "There is no place to go to find Him. There is nothing to do to find Him. He is already here."


My resolutions were replaced with a renewed determination to acknowledge this Presence, to honor the subtle and profound, to know that I was in Divine Company. This shift fostered in

a level of awake-ness. I recalled the words of Thomas Moore, "faith is a gift that allows the soul to remain attached to its own unfolding," and "my own position changes when I grant the world its soul."

"...what Truth the higher Man must know and follow what Good means at the level of the Kingdom of Heaven. They hunger for Good and thirst for Truth, for the union of these two ... makes ... the inner harmony called righteousness."

Maurice Nicoll, *The New Man*

As this new year, new day, new moment unfolds, my aim is multi-faceted, yet it remains under the loving umbrella of faith. That is my wish. As life continues to present frequent challenges, I must give myself permission to accept it all. My resolve is in keeping my practice present and remembering the constant and loving presence of the Divine. Referring to the Psalms, as a means to talk with God, we simply need to recall His reminder; "just talk to me ... and listen ..." and when we do,

I will feed you with the finest of wheat. And with honey from the rock, I would satisfy you. Psalm 81:16 

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work
Open Mind, Open Heart,

lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey.

Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according
to the method of Lectio Divina.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

2 IST GUIDELINE



Progress in the spiritual journey
is manifested by the unconditional acceptance
of other people, beginning with those with whom we live.

SEEDS

A sincere man is not so much one who sees the truth and
manifests it as he sees it, but one who loves the truth with
pure love. But truth is more than an abstraction. It lives and
is embodied in men and things that are real. And the secret of
sincerity is, therefore, not to be sought in a philosophical love for
abstract truth but in love for real people and real things—a love
for God apprehended in the world around us.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds*, page 59.



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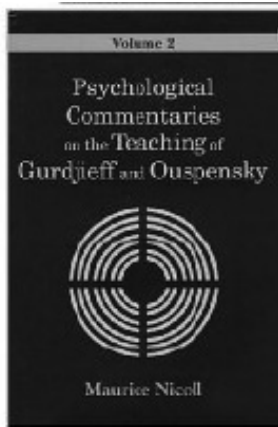
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THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

LIVE MORE CONSCIOUSLY

Now when you go round the circle of all experience you will begin to include the dark side of yourself in your consciousness and you no longer see any contradictions... This means seeing that summer and winter are not opposites but lie on a circle, a rhythm that is necessary...

I will quote you a very ancient saying about this. As long as you stand on a basis of rigid right and wrong you cannot make this psychological circle in yourself... The quotation is from the writings of Kwang-ze. He says: "All subjects may be looked at from two points of view—from that and from this... But that view involves both a right and a wrong; and this view involves also a right and a wrong:—are there indeed, or are there not, the two views, that and this? They have not found their point of correspondency which is called the pivot of the Tao. As soon as one finds this pivot, he stands in the center of the ring (of thought) where he can respond without end to the

changing views;—without end to those affirming, and without end to those denying. Therefore I said, "There is nothing like the proper light (of the mind)." This thing called the Tao is really the Work. It is a reconciliation of opposites in yourself and the reaching of a new place in which the opposites do not control you. It is called the Tao in ancient Chinese esotericism. It is a Way. Tao means a Way or a harmonizing Way. For example, at one moment you think you are good and at the next moment you think you are bad, and if you observe yourself critically you will always be in this dilemma, in this double feeling. Now I quote from a later writing on the same subject. According to Plato's report, Socrates tells his pupils that he once went to see a wise woman, the prophetess Diotima, and asked her about love. He said to her that Love was a great deity and beautiful, but Diotima replied that he was neither beautiful nor good.

"What then, is Love ugly and evil?" he objected, but Diotima answered: "Do you think that everything which is not beautiful must of necessity be ugly?" "Certainly," said Socrates. You will see here that Socrates was thinking on the opposites—that is, he was thinking in the ordinary way in which we all think.... Diotima asked Socrates: "Do you think everything that is not wise is ignorant? Do you not perceive that there is something between ignorance and wisdom?" "What is that?" said Socrates. "To have a right opinion or conjecture," was the answer, "a right opinion is something between understanding and ignorance." Socrates admitted the truth of this and Diotima then continued: "Do not then say that what is not beautiful is of necessity deformed, nor what is not good is of necessity evil, nor, since you have confessed that Love is neither beautiful nor good, infer, therefore, that he is deformed or evil, but rather something intermediate."

MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS AT CEDARBRAKE

June 17-26	10-day	\$725
Sep 9-14	6-day Welcoming	\$495
Dec 2-8	7-day Advent	\$625


“I am blessed to have been here at this time. As this was my first deep dive into not only Centering Prayer, but the true heart of the Christian message, the facilities, schedule and staff created a most loving and supportive environment which both allowed and beckoned me to safely dig deep. The repetition of activities created both spaces to go deep and come out to rest, like islands in the sea. The care, consideration and obvious refinement of the entire experience clearly demonstrates the grace of God, paired with human openness and efficacy. The staff set up a beautiful and safe container, which inspired my trust and willingness.

For this and more, I am grateful. This was truly a peak experience.”

~feedback from a 2015 Retreatant

Contact the office to register.

If we are on the Pendulum all thought and feeling lies in opposites. If a man does not agree with your political views he is hateful to you. If a man does not like you, he dislikes you, and so on. This is the Law of the Pendulum exemplified in all of us at our present state of Being and Knowledge. This is how the world of war and strife is carried on—namely, by people disagreeing with each other according to the Law of the Pendulum. In this Work we must find some way of reconciling these opposites and not being on this Pendulum swing at every moment... That is why the Work teaches us to observe ourselves uncritically because only by observing ourselves uncritically

can we go round the whole circle of our Being, of what we really are, and this will destroy False Personality completely. It will destroy all fanciful ideas, all pride, all vanity, in you. You will no longer be the same person as you imagined you were, because the imagination always lies. But ... this is impossible unless you are held by the strength of the Work ... unless you have a very strong sense that something is holding you and making you embrace these opposites, and causing you to get an entirely new sense of what you are. 

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, pages 732-734. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Work of Inner Christianity* class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

APRIL CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

Community Workday
Apr 2 9 am-noon

Annual Meeting of members & Board
Apr 3 following Sunday Service

Contemplative Response Training
Apr 16 9 am-noon

Intro to Centering Prayer
Apr 16 8:30 am-3:30 pm
Cost: \$75, lunch included
+ 6 consecutive Mondays 7:30-9 pm

One-Day Centering Prayer
Apr 23 8:30 am-4:30 pm
Cost: \$15, bring a dish to share

Baptism Class
Saturdays Apr 23 - May 14, 9-10:30 am

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Gurdjieff Music
Apr 19 7:30-8:30 pm

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8-9 am
Worship Service 10-11:30 am
Youth Program 10-11:30 am
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays
Prayer Circle 10:15-10:45 am
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm
Devotional Service

DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available
through the Bookstore and online at
www.consciousharmony.org



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THE GRACE OF TRANSFORMED VISION

The disciples could not recognize Jesus
as long as their mindsets
about who He was
and what He was to do were in place.
When Jesus demolished their blindness
with His explanation of the scriptures,
their vision of Him began to assume
a more realistic tone.

...When we let go of our private
and limited vision,
He who has been hidden from us
by our pre-packaged values
and preconceived ideas causes the scales
to fall from our eyes.
He was there all the time.
Now at least we perceive
His Presence.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*



*And it happened, while Jesus was with them at table,
He took bread, said the blessing,
broke it and gave it to them.
With that their eyes were opened
and they recognized Him,
but He vanished from their sight.
They said to one another,
'Were not our hearts burning inside us
as He talked to us on the way
and opened the scriptures to us?'*

Luke 24:30-32