

A blaze of glory (Luke 24:13-35)

## On the road to Emmaus, “burning” is a positive word.

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Ivanka Demchuk has a painting called *Road to Emmaus*. The Ukrainian artist's work is influenced by the techniques and aesthetics of iconography. Here we see Christ, in white, facing the two disciples on the road:



The gold filament, layered in a way that draws the eye immediately to it, is positioned on the disciples' torso region. Demchuk portrays that most significant phrase in the passage, "Were our hearts not burning in us as he spoke to us?" Her use of gold, against the back layers of white, effectively lights up the scene, as if

there is a ball of embers in their chests.

I love the image, both in the text and in this artwork, of hearts burning within us. It is, in this story, so good, such an indicator of trueness and of life.

We often think of the word *burning* in negative terms: it can mean destruction, annihilation, discomfort, or anxiety. When we were kids, we would say a verbal insult was a “burn.”

But on the road to Emmaus, the hearts burning within the disciples are a sign, they realize, of their standing in the presence of a spirit of truth, of being witness to an exciting revelation, of their minds being opened and coming into the light.

In his sonnet “Emmaus 1,” Malcolm Guite takes the image of burning and depicts how Christ transforms its essence into the wonder and truth of his revelation on the Road to Emmaus:

*And yet you know my darkness from within,  
My cry of dereliction is your own,  
You bore the isolation of my sin  
Alone, that I need never be alone.  
Now you reveal the meaning of my story  
That I, who burn with shame, might blaze with glory.*

This is the resurrection joy, told so beautifully on the road to Emmaus. The burn of shame turns into a blaze of glory. Where spirits were downcast in a dark world, the light was, in fact, to be found in a fellow traveler on the road. What was initially a story of fear and death in the wake of the crucifixion of a beloved friend and teacher concluded in the risen Lord burning their hearts in gold embers of life and truth.