

THE WALK OF FAITH

Luke 24:13-35

We only find this story about the walk to Emmaus in Luke's Gospel, but it's one of the best known stories about the resurrection even though we know nothing about Emmaus and it appears nowhere else in scripture. Tradition identifies it with the village of Kubeibeh, North West of Jerusalem, but we don't really know. I like to call this story the sunset walk to dawn. It's a story about how two people move from not recognising Jesus to knowing him and who he is. That's what we need to do, it's what everyone needs to do. So as we study this passage together you can find the main text on page [***] of the church Bibles and all the scripture I'm going to refer to will be displayed on the screen.

Two of Jesus's followers were taking a seven mile walk from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus on the afternoon of Easter Sunday when Jesus came and joined them, although they didn't initially recognise him – look at verses 13-16:

“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him.”
(verses 13-16)

These opening verses don't reveal the identity of the two followers of Jesus, but a little later in verse 18 we learn that one of them was Cleopas, who may well have been the husband of one of the women called Mary who witnessed the crucifixion (John 19:25). They were most probably returning home after having been in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus's Passion. Following Christ's crucifixion they believed they had no reason to remain in Jerusalem.

Cleopas and his companion were discussing Jesus's passion and probably the stories the women had told of the angels and the empty tomb as well. But, they were clearly full of sorrow, disappointment

and bewilderment because they didn't believe these stories told by the female witnesses to the resurrection. They haven't yet believed in the reality of Jesus's resurrection. At this point Jesus came up and joined them, but they were somehow initially prevented from recognising him. I believe we cannot see the risen Christ unless it is his will to disclose himself to us.

Jesus was not initially recognised on a number of occasions (Matthew 28:17; John 20:14; 21:4, 12) and so it was now. There must have been something subtly different about his resurrection body, it was almost the same, in the end recognisably the same, and yet different. This is a mystery which we shall not fully understand in this life. We should also note that Jesus was working in the lives of these two travellers before they noticed him and he's working tirelessly in our lives too, before we notice him, when we're unaware of his presence.

Jesus then asked them what they were discussing – see verses 17-24: “He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. 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?” “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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”” (verses 17-24)

These two followers seem to have expected Jesus to know that they would naturally have been discussing the crucifixion. They're surprised that he doesn't seem to know what has happened. Of course there's an irony here as Jesus is the only person who really knows and understands the fullness of what happened over the three days of that

first Easter. Cleopas and his companion understand Jesus as a prophet and mighty miracle worker, but they don't understand that like the prophets before him he had to suffer rejection, suffering and death. They don't understand the scriptural prophecies that Jesus has fulfilled concerning his suffering death and resurrection. To paraphrase the words that Paul would later write, the scandal of the cross has become a stumbling block for them (1 Corinthians 1:23). Have you lost hope in God's deliverance? Learn a lesson from these two followers and wait and see what the Lord will do.

They then remark that it's the third day since the crucifixion, obviously recalling Jesus's prophecy that he would rise on the third day, and tell of the women's discovery of the empty tomb. They're moving closer to understanding what happened on that first Easter Sunday, but they haven't yet arrived. They're still on their way.

Jesus then berates them for their lack of understanding and explains how the scriptures foretold all this – look at verses 25-27:

“He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (verses 25-27)

Jesus was of course explaining the Hebrew scripture of what we now call the Old Testament – which was all the scripture they had at that time. But, I don't think we should see Jesus as quoting a few isolated verses of that Hebrew Scripture. I think the text makes it clear that Jesus was explaining how the whole of Old Testament scripture points to his coming and his mission – which it certainly does. Our Bible is a unified whole, let us never believe that we can afford to disregard the Old Testament.

The central point of Jesus's teaching is in verse 26 – “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Of course, from the point of view of these two followers the answer is categorically ‘NO’. From our perspective almost two thousand years after the cross, and with the benefit of all the New Testament

scripture, we can see that the answer is an emphatic ‘YES’ and bow down in worship and adoration. It’s important to note that Jesus begins his teaching with the scripture, God’s word to us. We can’t have a real solid faith unless it’s firmly based on God’s word. If we’re really growing in our faith then we too will have a burning desire to engage with our Bibles just as Cleopas and his companion did.

Cleopas, his companion and Jesus are now nearing the end of their physical journey and they’re approaching the end of their spiritual journey too – see verses 28-32:

“As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. 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?"”
(verses 28-32)

In verse 28 it seems as if they might be separated from Jesus without realising his identity and without realising the significance of this particular day they have called ‘the third’. But, in verse 29 they extend hospitality to Jesus and urge him to stay with them. If we want Jesus to come and share fellowship with us we must invite him into our hearts.

Once he is at the meal table with them Jesus seems to change his role, he is no longer a guest but the host who has the duty of distributing the bread. Jesus’s actions in breaking the bread and distributing it remind us of the events of the Last Supper with the disciples just a few days before (Luke 22:19), although Cleopas was not present at that event. Sin had its origins at the Fall in a forbidden meal and liberation from sin was signalled by Jesus in another meal at the Last Supper. So, Jesus has commanded us to commemorate that liberation and forgiveness in the celebratory meal of Holy Communion. Jesus’s actions with the bread clearly had a revelatory function, because the

spiritual eyes of Cleopas and his companion are now opened and they recognise Jesus for who he was and is.

Just as suddenly as he had drawn near in verse 15 Jesus now disappears and attention returns to the dialogue between his followers. The difference between the beginning and the end is remarkable. Earlier, they were puzzling over recent events, but they are now able to articulate the reality of the divine presence among them, transforming them, as they had been touched when they had the Scriptures interpreted to them during the journey. May we also be touched by God's word as we study it and it is opened to us by the aid and power of the Holy Spirit. Our faith needs to be soundly based on the eternal truths of the Bible. May we study these truths diligently and come to know and understand them as fully as we are able. When we base our faith firmly on God's word rather than the uncertain foundations of our feelings we are equipped to face times of trial and difficulty as we stand on God's promises.

Jesus opened up the scriptures to Cleopas and his companion, let us open up to God's word also. Father may our hearts also burn within us with the fire and power of your word. David Brainerd wrote in his diary, "Oh that I could be a flame of fire in the service of my God!" Does your heart burn for the truths of God, or has it grown cold? Two of the marks of true conversion are the way our minds are changed as we study God's word and the way our hearts are changed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Cleopas and his companion immediately get up and return to Jerusalem in spite of the lateness of the hour and the dangers of travelling after nightfall, apparently without finishing their meal – look at verses 33-35:

"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread." (verses 33-35)

In Jerusalem they find the 11 remaining disciples who have by now become convinced of the reality of the resurrection and are now referring to Jesus as 'Lord'. They were not prepared to take the word of the women who were witnesses of the resurrection, but apparently Jesus's appearance to Simon Peter had convinced them. The arrival of the travellers substantiates the reality of the resurrection even further and the reference to the breaking of the bread provides a link both to the celebratory meals enjoyed by the early church (Acts 2:42) and our contemporary celebration of Holy Communion. May our table fellowship with Jesus over Holy Communion reveal him to us as it did to Cleopas and his companion.

Cleopas and no doubt the other disciples had hoped that Jesus would free Israel from the pagan domination of Rome, but they will come to see that Jesus has provided a far greater redemption – liberation from sin and death. God didn't liberate Israel *from* suffering, instead he redeemed Israel and all mankind *through* suffering. Through the suffering of Christ on the cross. Christ's death and resurrection were essential features of his Messiahship. We were unable to liberate ourselves from sin by our own efforts, so the Father sent his only son to become sin for us and to die the death that we deserved in our place.

The whole Emmaus discussion underlines the point that Jesus's Passion was part of God's plan of deliverance and demonstrates the reality of the resurrection. Luke wanted Theophilus and his other readers to know that and we need to know it as well. God wants us to be on the road to glory, and it's a road with a cross on it. What Cleopas and his companion saw was not the end of hope, but rather its beginning. Initially Cleopas and his companion were despondent because they didn't yet believe in the risen Christ. We too will be despondent until we fully believe in the reality of Jesus's resurrection. Until we can truly say and believe in our hearts – He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Unfortunately many people still refuse to believe in the resurrection today in spite of nearly 2,000 years of witness and analysis of all the

evidence. What more will it take? For Cleopas and his companion it took the living breathing Jesus in their midst. For many people today it takes the presence of living breathing Christians amongst them. Are you willing to go out and be that witness to those who have not yet believed?