

Emmaus Road we must all travel

Luke 24:13-25

Prayer: Lord help us to discern your presence in the times of doubt and questioning. Burn & Brand your love upon our hearts and show yourself to us in the breaking of bread.

"Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked to us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?" Lord give us not Heartburn (burning sensation in chest caused by Indigestion! Too much world, too much other spirituality) instead let Christ burn and brand His love onto our hearts as we journey.

The story of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus is perhaps the most illuminating and helpful of the Resurrection appearances. In the middle of doubt and questioning, Cleopas & his friend (not part of the special 12!), are helped to faith and understanding. Their cold hearts are warmed as they discern the presence of the Risen Lord through the Word being broken open and the Breaking of Bread.

The travellers to Emmaus question like us the pain and injustice of life. Why do the innocent suffer? How can the bright prospect of God's kingdom end in the darkness of Calvary? Is it inevitable in an evil world that the finest promises offered to mankind in the vision of the prophets are not meant to be fulfilled? In their desperation and despair, these heart broken pilgrims find someone who walks by their side. They do not recognise Him and, as he falls into step with them, they are not aware that the World has changed or the darkness lifted. Yet, step-by-step, their journey leads them to a great truth that had eluded them. Their cold hearts are warmed into life; their questioning minds are blessed by a growing understanding of God's purposes at work in all things, even in the hurtful and the cruel. They find a presence. So a simple meal becomes a banquet of which Jesus Christ is the host: Come not to express an opinion but to seek His

presence. And isn't that the summary of the journey we are all on?

So picture the scene: these two friends of Jesus are returning to Emmaus. It is springtime - yet they do not hear the singing of the birds, or admire the awakening of nature. With lagging feet, under a heavy sky, they continue on their way home - home from a funeral! A dear one has been buried - they reminisce, thinking about the Lord, even in the valley of the shadow of death, finding a fellowship. Blinded by grief and barriers to disbelief, they fail to recognise the stranger, they fail to realise that Jesus comes to all who seek Him! He is with us on our journeys too!

Humanly speaking, they failed to recognise Jesus because, like many a modern sceptic, they were convinced that miracles of resurrection or new life could not happen. Jesus was dead, and no amount of hearsay evidence about visions of angels and an empty tomb could persuade them otherwise. They had thought that He would be the Messiah of Jewish nationalist expectation who would redeem Israel from Gentile domination, and that hope had proved illusory. Jesus is interested to hear where they are at and us too! "Yes stranger, we hoped that He was the one who would redeem Israel". "We hoped (past tense) but now all hope is gone."

They were hoping, but the flame of hope had almost been extinguished. "And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place." As if to say. "Even after Jesus was crucified we entertained some hope that God might suddenly intervene and send deliverance. But it did not happen; not on the first day, nor on the second, and now it is already the third day. And still no change for the better.....and yet, and yet! Still a tiny flicker of hope is left - the divine spark in us all, ready to be set ablaze by the Holy Spirit of God! 2 Timothy 1:6 says Fan into Flame the Gift of God given to you.. It's the whoosh of the pilot light bursting into flame and it's the same with our lives. So Jesus, still the stranger, having got them to open up to Him says: What

are you discussing together as you walk along? What things? And He meets them where they are and opens up the scriptures to them. "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe everything that the prophets had spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" The two crucial words here seem to be EVERYTHING - the disciples applied to the Messiah all the references to glory but not those which suggested suffering - and NECESSARY - the disciples failed to see that Jesus must die, he must be lifted up, in order to draw all people to him. They understood the nice bits but conveniently ignored the harsh bits! Are we guilty of that same selective approach to the scriptures? He confronts their foolishness and ours!

The Bible study completed, they arrived at Emmaus. Jesus acted as if He was continuing on further - and he would have done so had they not prevailed upon Him to stay with them. For the Plan of God for our lives does not cancel out decision-making and free will on our part. Although the Stranger at first, had been an intrusion on their grief, they were happy now to have Him stay and tell them more. Once in the house, the disciples recognise Jesus in the breaking of Bread - did they see the marks of the nails in his hands? Was it the manner in which He broke the Bread and gave it to them that opened their eyes? (Incidentally this was how the first Christians remembered Jesus through breaking bread and sharing wine: and my guess is that they would be surprised and critical that we have turned it into a ritual of Holy Communion.) Or was it the way in which He spoke to His Father that refreshed their memories? Whatever the answer, the Body of His resurrection now possessed qualities enabling Him to appear at will and also, as here, to vanish at will. And He vanished from their sight.

The exclamation of Cleopas and his friend is understandable - their hearts had been warmed (Wesley):(Burning Hearts), their

Spirits awakened and illumined, their hope revived. The Easter tragedy had been turned into the Easter triumph. They knew the women had been right - far from talking nonsense, they had spoken the truth. And Jesus had singled them out for the privilege of having the scriptures opened to them, so that they now understood as they had never done before (He does the same for the disciples later that evening).

So filled were these two men with joy that they must tell others - they had walked seven miles, it was dark and dangerous - but they must walk another seven - this news was and is so electrifying and reassuring that the other disciples must know about it - not tomorrow but that night! That's the excitement that one experiences when you meet with the Risen Lord.

Now some glorious principles hold good for us through this story:

Jesus meets us on the road (v15): What's your Road?

Need to set out & take a step of faltering faith!

Are we serious in wanting a relationship with God?

We always have freewill.

"Where two or Three"

Not a mandate for declining Churches but a reminder of the power of agreement and unity around the Throne of Grace!

Jesus comes and walks with earnest seekers. Belonging comes before believing. Often no initial recognition because of unbelief. His Presence makes the difference (not a philosophical or reasoned argument/ not the faith of others/ not a good Bible study alone)

The measure to which the Lord Jesus is central and supreme in all we do as a local Church will be the measure of our fruitfulness for the Master.

Jesus starts where we are

Grief, bewilderment: rather than 'Nice weather isn't it!' What are you talking about? What concerns you?

Draws from us what we know to be true.

All capable of witness. Uncovers the important things we know deep down. Our knowledge will always be incomplete.

Rebuke for Unbelief

Do not neglect the Scriptures: miss so much! No wonder you look glum! Lack of faith. Holy Spirit teaches and make clear. Don't miss Joy of Salvation!

Jesus reveals himself

Through meals, in home, through act of giving. Holy Spirit transformation: drawn to Jesus.

Immediate response of Hearts that were burning!

My witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The Emmaus Road encounter is perhaps the parable of the earnest seeker after God: to such a person Jesus will come and begin to walk with and talk to by His Spirit, meeting them where they are; gradually bringing them to a point when the divine spark bursts into flame, and the seeker becomes a disciple of the Living Risen Jesus.

The disciples had of course to set out on that fateful journey - and we too, if we have not already must journey along that road. Burning hearts attract attention: Let Christ fan into flame the divine spark in you and I guarantee your life will never be the same again, and nor those around you, who will forever be thankful for the day you let Christ has full control of your life. Canterbury needs a Hearts Burning Church, a Church that knows how to take an Emmaus Journey - ordinary people in the hands of an Extraordinary God, set on fire for Jesus and wanting every person in this region to meet with Him as they journey too!

Pastor David

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